

DOCTORAL THESIS

An exploration of women's perceptions of perpetrating domestic violence against their partners An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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**An exploration of women's perceptions of perpetrating domestic
violence against their partners: An Interpretative
Phenomenological Analysis.**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of
Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology**

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Date

2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to Dr Rosemary Clare Rizq and Professor Mick Cooper who supervised this study. In particular I would like to thank them for their belief in this research, their enthusiasm and the time and invaluable feedback they gave me. I would also like to extend my thanks and appreciation to the agencies that offered me advice and helped me to recruit participants for the study. On that note, my sincere thanks must go to all the women who took part in this research for their honesty and bravery in coming forward. Finally, I would like to thank my husband Julian Wren, for his continuous support, encouragement and patience with me when things were not going so well.

ABSTRACT

*“DO NOT GENERICALLY LABEL, PACKAGE AND ATTEMPT TO JUSTIFY MY
ACTIONS AS THAT OF AN ABUSED WOMAN. THERE IS A LOT OF RAGE
BUILT UP INSIDE ME”*

Guinevere Garcia, 1996

(In Pearson, 1998; When she was Bad, p. 59)

Background: Instances of female perpetrated domestic violence are rising yet research in this domain is limited and there continues to be a focus on exploring male perpetrated acts of domestic violence (Steinmetz, 1977; Straus & Gelles, 1986). There is evidence of a population of women who are the dominant aggressors of domestic violence yet few studies explore the experiences of this group (Mills, 2003). This study aims to qualitatively explore female perpetrators accounts of their domestic violence toward men and their perceptions of that, including their understanding as to how those acts arose. This could highlight the treatment and supportive needs of this particular group and could inform the way in which counsellors work with female perpetrators through increasing our understanding of the possible factors that are linked with and contribute to their aggression.

Method: Interviews were conducted with eight women who self identified as the primary aggressor of domestic violence in their (heterosexual) relationships. Their accounts were audio recorded and analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Findings: Three themes emerged from this including: violence in the wake of multiple triggers, the all encompassing emotional experience, and violence as the unrecognisable intruder.

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CHAPTER SUMMARY

A chapter summary is presented here in order to guide the reader to the format of this thesis.

CHAPTER ONE – Provides a Literature Review

CHAPTER TWO – Methodology

CHAPTER THREE – Findings: data analysis and the presentation of key themes

CHAPTER FOUR – Discussion and Reflections

CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION.

“Human violence is much more complicated, ambiguous, and, most of all, tragic, than is commonly realised or acknowledged” (Gilligan, 1996, p.1). This powerful statement is taken from James Gilligan’s 1996 book titled *Violence* in which he shares with the reader, in the opening paragraph, his experiences of witnessing violence in his own family history. Gilligan’s admission, that family violence was part of his childhood seemed brave, and it helped me find the courage to be open about my own experiences of witnessing domestic violence. Those experiences are, in part, what account for my interest in this field and have led me to produce research which focuses on the sensitive topic of women’s perceptions of their domestically violent acts.

I am aware of some of the preconceptions that exist about domestic violence, including the view that men are always the perpetrators while women are always the victims or that women’s violence is a consequence of their emotional instability and fluctuating hormones. Although the former statement may hold true in a large proportion of cases, emerging evidence has revealed it is by no means universal (Straus & Gelles, 1988; Wellton, 2011). The capacity for reflexive thinking was a fundamental part of this study in order to reduce the likelihood that I would impose those assumptions onto the participants’ accounts (Hastie & Hay, 2012; Willig, 2008). I aimed to listen to the women with openness and I acknowledged the impact my worldview would have on that process. As a female researcher engaging

in interviews with violent women, it also seemed imperative for me to consider and reflect upon what my own relationship with anger and aggression has been.

The aim of this research is to explore female perpetrators accounts of their domestic violence toward men and their perception of that, including their understanding as to how those acts arose. With a growing interest and curiosity in this phenomenon, I was motivated by what I believed was the myth that women cannot and do not perpetrate domestic violence toward men (Messer, Maughan, Quinton, Taylor, 2004). This view is perpetuated by gender stereotypes and is upheld by our ideas concerning what it means to be a woman (Goux, 1992; Oakley, 1981). I considered that a broader and much deeper questioning of the societal and anthropological factors that impact on women seemed relevant to this research.

As a counselling psychologist trainee, I have worked with women who were violent toward their partners and in practice the women expressed their relief at being able to disclose their experiences. However, they also grappled with feelings of shame and struggled to understand their behaviour. My reaction toward those women was one of compassion, yet I also felt unsure how to help them, knowing little about the reasons why women perpetrate domestic violence toward men. Their experiences further highlighted that domestic violence was not only a male problem and I was aware of the discrepancy between that view and the women's disclosures in therapy. Despite that, female perpetrators continue to be largely underrepresented in the literature and generally in society (Cook, 1997). It was my view that a deeper exploration of female perpetrators' behaviour could enhance counselling

psychologists' awareness of this phenomenon and inform the way in which they work with and engage violent women (Fauth, 2006).

It has been argued that it was largely the work of feminists that was responsible for our increasing awareness of the problem of domestic violence in society (Dobash & Dobash, 1984). In particular the work of radical feminists, arising in second wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, sought to increase our understanding that domestic violence was a consequence of a patriarchal society (Radford, 1987). Controversially they claimed that men used violence to control women, not only for their own individual interests, but in the interests of men as a sex class who are primarily concerned with the reproduction of heterosexuality and male supremacy (Radford, 1987). Radical feminists believe that women rarely perpetrate domestic violence or if they do that it is almost certainly a reaction to male violence in the form of self defence (Dobash & Dobash, 1984; Radford, 1987).

Radical feminists have been criticised for viewing all men as equally likely to victimise female partners and having a desire to control women (Laflamme, Burrows & Hasselberg 2009). By the same token, they have been criticised for viewing all women's violence as tantamount to acts of self defence (Leflamme, Burrows & Hasselberg, 2009). Radical feminists fail to take into account the accuracy of information about the *other* motivations and causes behind men and women's violence and their views are often deemed reductionistic (Leflamme, Burrows & Hasselberg, 2009). Although radical feminists propose that patriarchy is the overarching social structure that engenders abuse, this view can be criticised for ignoring the multifaceted and complex nature of the problem (Dekseredy, 2007).

Furthermore, the work of radical feminists is believed to maintain the gender binary in that they regard men as dominant and aggressive while women are perceived as passive victims of male violence (Dekseredy, 2007).

Third wave feminists emerged in the 1990s and although they claimed to respect the achievements of second wave feminists they wished, nonetheless, to move beyond it (Denfeld, 1995). Third wave feminists were concerned with the way that second wave feminism tended to portray women as victims. In their view, this seemed at odds with the increasing amount of freedom, self confidence and autonomy felt by a number of modern women in society (Denfeld, 1995). They argued that the work of second wave feminists failed to recognise the ever changing and evolving social climate in which we live. In essence they believed that 'victim feminism' could prevent women from developing their self confidence to improve their situations further and that it denied women agency (Wolf, 2001).

In relation to domestic violence, third wave feminists have made valuable contributions to understanding this phenomenon through their consideration of macro as well as micro level forces (Wolf, 2001). For instance, they give greater credence to unemployment or obstacles to economic empowerment, lack of resources and other social construct factors such as childhood experiences of violence, as issues which play an important role in men and women's violence. They have also highlighted that greater controls over the degree of sexism that is portrayed in the mass media could vastly improve the social climate for women (Wolf, 2001). In particular, third wave feminists have investigated the way in which status inconsistency between intimate partners can be connected with their

use of violence (Allen & Straus, 1990, Campbell, 1993). They propose that vast discrepancies in earnings could cause violence between couples, with males assaulting female partners under the condition of their (female partners) dependency (Allen & Straus, 1990, Campbell, 1993). In addition, it has been claimed that women with lower resources may be more likely to report engaging in violence against male partners as they are less able, than women with greater resources, to flee a violent relationship (Allen & Straus, 1990).

Third wave feminists have also investigated the legal policies and the mandatory arrest rule in cases of domestic violence. They note that under the current 'mandatory prosecution rule' the decision to bring about charges against a perpetrator of domestic violence is in the hands of the prosecutor and it is not in the victim's power (Klein & Orloff, 1993). In essence, this means that once a victim has reported domestic violence he or she loses the ability to control whether the perpetrator is prosecuted as the responsibility is removed from the victim entirely (Klein & Orloff, 1993). Third wave feminists propose that mandatory interventions of this kind reinforce the battered woman's psychic injury and it encourages feelings of guilt, low self esteem and dependency (Mills, 1999). In fact, it is their view that this process realigns the victim with the perpetrator in the sense that by removing her power to decide whether or not to prosecute her perpetrator, current domestic violence laws reduce women's agency (Mills, 1999). As Mills (1999) points out, under the current mandatory prosecution scheme, a woman is not free to decide whether to overlook or 'ignore' the battering for her own idiosyncratic reasons.

Third wave feminism has been pivotal in giving increasing recognition to the individual rather than women as a group and they disapprove of the lack of diversity in second wave feminism. To an extent, third wave feminism is a response by women of colour and others who have felt homogenised by a movement defined primarily by the goals of white, middle class women (Harris, 1990). It has been argued that increasing numbers of young women are reluctant to identify with the stereotype of second wave feminism, which encompasses the notion that women lack certain characteristics in particular types of leadership qualities and the capacity to be aggressive (Harris, 1990).

A further advancement in the domestic violence literature is the identification of the levels of trauma that are experienced by women who are or have been victims of partner violence (Harned, Jackson, Comtois, & Linehan, 2010). This work further broadens our understanding of the violence that is perpetrated by women. The research in this domain takes a three pronged approach and has examined the trauma symptoms that are experienced by female victims of domestic violence, the connection between childhood experiences of traumatic events and the development of trauma symptomatology in emerging adult relationships, and the link between prior traumatic events and the use of partner violence (Powers, Halpern, Ferenshak, Gillihan, Foa, 2010). The increasing number of studies which explore the relationship between trauma and women's victimisation and perpetration of domestic violence, marks an important point of departure from conceptualising all women's violence toward men as a form of self defence (Kubany, Rolston, & Hill, 2010).

Importantly, these fresh concerns for the link between trauma symptoms and female perpetration of domestic violence, is a nod to the complex and multifaceted nature of the problem. Furthermore, an exploration of the relationship between trauma and domestic violence could mean that we will work with women who are violent in a much more helpful way and that addressing their individual needs based on the nature of their traumatic stressor and the impact that has had on their daily functioning, is critical (Schnurr, 2009).

A traumatic event can be thought of as one which ‘involves actual or threatened death, serious injury or threat to physical integrity’ and gives rise to feelings of fear, horror and helplessness (Kubany, Rolston, & Hill, 2010). There is ample evidence that severe or life threatening trauma is a risk factor for the development of psychiatric illness such as posttraumatic stress disorder and depression (Hathaway, Boals, & Banks, 2010; Kessler, 2000). It is clear from the literature that women are believed to be twice as likely as men to develop symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder once exposed to a major or life threatening traumatic event (Anders, Frazier & Frankfurt, 2011; Kessler, 1995; Kessler, 2000).

It has been argued that the type, number and severity of traumatic events that an individual experiences has an influence on their posttraumatic stress symptomatology (Anders, Frazier & Frankfurt, 2011; Kessler, 1995). Recent research appears to indicate that posttraumatic stress symptoms among those who experience interpersonal traumatic stressors such as, domestic violence are more severe and persistent compared to those who experience other forms of posttraumatic stressors (Anders et al, 2011; McNally & Robinaugh, 2011).

A recent study examined the impact of posttraumatic stress disorder on daily functioning among women who experienced bi-directional violence in their relationships (Hellmuth, Jacquier, Swan & Sullivan, 2014). Hellmuth et al (2011) were also interested in whether the women met the full diagnostic criteria for PTSD, and the severity of the physical, psychological, and sexual domestic violence victimisation and use of partner violence. The women in the study were divided into low, moderate and high sub groups depending on the extent to which they met the criteria (17 symptoms) for PTSD. The findings highlighted that women in the moderate and high severity sub groups were found to report significantly more severe use of psychological and physical violence toward their partners (Hellmuth, Jacquier, Swan & Sullivan, 2014). Furthermore, the highest mean severity of depression was found in the high sub group, and women in all three classes reported re-experiencing the traumatic event, avoidance, numbness and hyper-arousal, all of which are symptoms that are characteristic of PTSD (Hellmuth, Jacquier, Swan & Sullivan, 2014).

Trauma theory has been particularly useful for increasing our understanding as to why some victims of domestic violence struggle to leave an abusive relationship (Reid, Haskell, Dillahun-Aspillaga & Thor, 2013). A phenomenon known as ‘trauma bonding’ is one such explanation for this difficulty and has stemmed from the vast body of work on attachment theory (Reid, Haskell, Dillahun-Aspillaga & Thor, 2013). In an early study, Suomi, Harlow & McKinney (1972) subjected baby monkeys to alternate periods with a terry clothed monkey and a mechanical ‘abusive’ adult monkey and found that in every case, the baby monkeys would rush back and cling to their mothers regardless of the abuse they were subjected to

(Suomi, Harlow & McKinney 1972). Suomi et al (1972) concluded that this bond was a survival defence mechanism in which the baby monkeys were driven to bond with a caregiver, even an abusive one, as their survival fully depended on it (Suomi, Harlow & McKinney 1972). Subsequently, researchers have argued that it is the alternate moments of affection coupled with the abuse, that forms a particularly potent type of traumatic bonding and they base their explanations of Stockholm syndrome on this very notion (Demarest, 2009; Dutton & White, 2012; Reid et al, 2013; Spidel, Vincent, Huss, Winters, Thomas & Dutton, 2006).

Graham (1995) developed the Stockholm syndrome theory and linked it specifically to intimate partner violence although the term is most often used to refer to hostages' psychological responses to their hostage takers (Herman, 2001). Graham (1995) claimed that four pre-cursors were necessary for the development of Stockholm syndrome including, perceived threat to survival, perceived kindness, isolation, and the perceived inability to escape. In her view, Stockholm syndrome represents a defence mechanism for coping with these factors and includes cognitive and perceptual distortions. For instance, Graham found that among those experiencing Stockholm syndrome there was a clear tendency to rationalise and minimise a violent partner's behaviour and furthermore they exhibited high levels of self blame and reported feelings of love despite living in a context of fear (Graham, 1995).

In recent years, parallels have been drawn between a child's traumatic attachment with a violent parent and Stockholm syndrome (Herman, 2001). For instance, in Stockholm syndrome it is a self preservation strategy for the hostage to adopt a

compliant, cooperative and supportive stance toward the hostage taker due to the belief that a captor is less likely to harm a hostage who cooperates (Herman, 2001). Therefore, a child who has been raised in a hostile, violent environment and who fears a parent may then make a great deal of effort to please and appease the adult (Becker-Weidman, 2009; Oransky, Hahn, & Sotver, 2013). Although the child may appear securely attached, this 'bond' to the parent has in fact been formed through fear and terror (Collins, Patel, Joestl, March, Insel & Daar, 2011) and such children are at increased risk of developing trauma symptoms (Cicchetti, Rogasch, Gunnar, Toth, 2010). When we consider the research which shows that women who have secure attachment styles are far less likely than those with anxious, fearful attachment styles to perpetrate or experience emotional abuse, the importance of learning more about the connection between trauma bonding in childhood and the subsequent emergence of violent behaviour in adulthood is magnified (Lindsey, Gilreath, Thompson, Graham, Hawley, Weisbart, Kotch, 2012).

In conducting this research, I felt that creating a space for women so that they could talk about their experiences was important, bearing in mind that empirical findings in this domain predominantly stem from a quantitative, positivist approach (Walby & Allen, 2004). Studies which focus on the quantification of women's violence, tend to rely on self-reports to ascertain the incidence and types of violence that men and women perpetrate in their relationships. Those studies are used to claim that men and women are equally violent and commit similar rates of domestic violence in partner relationships (Taylor & Chandler, 1995). However, this statistical focus means that the complex nature of this phenomenon is overlooked and we are left with data that is often inaccurate and unreliable (Walby & Allen, 2004).

Furthermore, such outcomes tell us little about the motivations or consequences for women who perpetrate domestic violence and our understanding of their experiences remains limited (Hettrich & O’Leary, 2007). Therefore the gap in the literature appears to be that women’s perceptions of perpetrating domestic violence have not been deeply explored and there have been few attempts to understand women’s violence or engage them in discussions so that they can voice their experience in their own terms.

In undertaking this research and organising the material presented in the literature review which follows I adopted a critical stance. Critical theory has Marxist roots (Cannella & Lincoln, 2009). From this standpoint I endeavoured to highlight some of the approaches and theories which challenge the taken for granted assumptions about women and in turn their use of violence. Critical research, in the main, aims to highlight the societal structures of power and domination which best serves some individuals while marginalising and dominating others (Mertens, 2005). In exploring the topic of women’s violence, the literature review encompasses and gives particular thought to feminist perspectives and gender issues. Critical perspectives are based on a closer investigation of the origins of taken for granted political and social structures. Furthermore, they illuminate how “victims” of those arrangements come to accept and even collaborate in maintaining oppressive elements of the system (Cannella & Lincoln, 2009, p55). Central to critical research are two fundamental questions concerning who is legitimated, privileged and helped in society and who, by contrast, is disqualified, harmed and oppressed. In relation to this study, critical perspectives are used to explore, understand and uncover how women’s violence might be related to aspects of social division or the

power differentials that exist in society and operate to disenfranchise women (Lerner, 1986).

Although female perpetrators of domestic violence are the focus of this study, it does not seek to deflect from the issue of domestic violence against women. I undertook this research with an awareness of the significant, global problem of women as victims of domestic violence (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise & Watts, 2003; Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, Lozano, 2002) and that was not forgotten throughout this process.

To help guide the reader, a breakdown of the various sections of the literature review is provided. This first section introduces the chapter's intentions, section two introduces the definitions of domestic violence and the prevalence of female perpetrated acts, section three briefly discusses the focus on male perpetrated domestic violence and the emerging evidence for female perpetrated acts. Section four introduces the 'gender symmetry debate', section five explores the motivations and contributing factors behind women's violence, section six examines the case of patriarchy and the social construction of gender. Finally, section seven outlines current qualitative research and the aims of this study.

THE DEFINITIONS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE PREVALENCE OF FEMALE PERPETRATED ACTS.

There are a wide range of terms that are used to encapsulate the physical and emotional violence that can occur in intimate partner relationships. Overall there is

agreement that definitions of domestic violence are socially constructed and reflect societies' understanding of this phenomenon, the interest in it and power distributions (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999). Currently, there is ongoing debate concerning the terminology that is used to encapsulate this phenomenon (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999). There is a lack of consensus as to whether domestic violence should be a gender specific or neutral referent, encompassing all forms of abuse occurring in all types of intimate relationships (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999; Mullender 1996).

Popular, current definitions of domestic violence include “the physical, emotional, sexual or mental abuse that one partner inflicts upon the other” (Cook, 1997, p 195). The women’s aid federation add that domestic violence includes the threat of such acts or the arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (The Women’s Aid Federation, 2000). In 2013, the Home Office amended their definition to include those as young as 16 stating: “domestic violence is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional” abuse (Home Office, 2013).

The term ‘domestic violence’ first emerged in the mid 70s in the United Kingdom to encapsulate the violence and abuse that arises in intimate partner relationships (Steinmetz, 1977). The emergence of this term followed the work of second wave feminist scholars in the late 60s and 70s who were interested in exploring the

history and impact of misogyny and gender inequality in various spheres of life (Gelles, 1975). As a result of their work it was generally acknowledged that patriarchy was the overarching social construct that engenders abuse (Steinmetz, 1977). However, the term 'domestic violence' has been subject to some criticism on the basis that it is commonly thought to refer to the acts of violence and aggression that take place within the household domain. Indeed Gilligan states that violence is something which often 'begins at home' (Gilligan, 1996, p. 5). It is perhaps all too easy to associate the term with a type of violence that takes place 'behind closed doors' and is synonymous with the private and the personal as opposed to it being a much wider social, legal and political problem (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). In particular the word 'domestic' evokes images of a traditional heterosexual, nuclear, family unit, which denies the reality of the violence that we now know occurs among dating, same sex, bisexual and transgender populations (Brown & Groscup, 2009; Factor & Rothblum, 2007; Houston & McKirnan, 2007; Island & Lettellier, 1991; Landers & Gilsanz, 2009).

It has been argued that the term 'domestic violence' is outdated and denies the violence that can occur within public settings or the abuse that takes place online and via modern mobile technology (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015, 2016). Furthermore, the definition of domestic violence does not include the forms of surveillance that are employed by some abusers to track and threaten a spouse. It seems important to highlight that it may be worth making these different forms of violence much more visible as well as the contexts in which they can occur (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015). The term 'domestic violence' is said to broadly encompass the 'psychological, physical and emotional' abuse that can arise in intimate

relationships (Home Office, 2013). However, it might be said that this term does not adequately reflect the intricate, multifaceted nature of partner violence or the more invisible, subtle and symbolic forms of violence that are often at play (Kelly & Westmarland, 2016).

The 2013 Home Office definition of domestic violence has received criticism for only acknowledging female genital mutilation, forced marriage and honour based violence in a footnote (Kelly & Westmarland, 2016). The wording of the 2013 Home Office definition takes a gender neutral stance, which is puzzling when we consider forms of violence such as female genital mutilation, which is gender specific. It has also been argued that the Home Office definition tends to focus primarily on tactics of coercion and control which is predominantly drawn from work on partner violence yet downgrades the forms of violence that are experienced by minority women (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015). Kelly & Westmarland (2016) claim this plays into and fuels the ‘othering’ of forms of violence that mainly affect the lives of minority women.

In addition, the Home Office definition of domestic violence has come under fire for conflating family violence and intimate partner violence (George, 2013). This means that under the current definition it is assumed that the dynamics which occur in intimate partner violence are the same as those which take place between other family members thus the tactics of control and coercion are equally relevant to family members who perpetrate acts of violence (Kelly & Westmarland, 2016). In particular it has been noted that coercive control is a concept developed to make sense of the subtle ways in which men impose their will in heterosexual partner

relationships and it draws on cultural norms about masculinity and femininity (Johnson, 2008). Therefore, it might be deemed problematic to make similar assumptions about the violence that occurs in other relationships, which are often generational and in which issues of gender and sexuality play out differently (Johnson, 2008; Kelly & Westmarland, 2016).

One final note is that the current Home Office definition (2013) refers to domestic violence as ‘any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse’ which arguably obscures the reality of much of the domestic violence which occurs between intimate partners. For instance, Kelly & Westmarland (2016) claim it is precisely the *repetition* of forms of power and control which makes violence between intimate partners so damaging and they propose that the inclusion of ‘any incident’ means that a single push or slap from a partner will be given the same weight as repeated, prolific acts of violence.

In addition to the Home Office definition of domestic violence, there is a range of other terms including ‘family violence’. ‘Family violence’ is used to describe any act of physical, sexual and psychological abuse. This form of violence includes the misuse of power with attempts to cause harm to the family members involved (Saltzman, Fanslow, MacMahon, Shelley, 1999). Unlike the other definitions of relationship violence that are circulating, this term refers to wider forms of violence such as child and elder abuse. This term was not selected for this research on the basis that it encompasses acts of violence that occur outside the context of intimate partner relationships.

As a relatively new term, ‘intimate partner violence’ is used to denote the physical, sexual or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse (Saltzman, Fanslow, MacMahon, Shelley, 2002). This type of violence is shown to occur between heterosexual and same sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy. Psychological harm refers to any threat of violence or the use of coercive tactics by a partner and encompasses humiliation, attempts to control and isolate the victim and various forms of harassment (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

In 2011, Johnson (2011) took the term ‘intimate partner violence’ one step further when he identified and analysed three sub-types of violence that occur in intimate partner relationships. For instance, ‘violent resistance’ was the term he gave to the violence that was predominantly perpetrated by women. This type of violence was commonly used by them as a coping strategy in response to what he named ‘intimate terrorism’ (Johnson, 2011). The latter was identified by Johnson (2011) as largely perpetrated by men, or those who sought to control and dominate “their” women using an array of coercive tactics. He termed his final sub-type ‘situational couple violence’ which was used to delineate the types of violence that occurred in response to situation specific conflict and were less likely to include severe forms of violence (Johnson, 2011). Johnson (2011) argued that intimate terrorists were more likely to be found in studies that used agency samples whereas those experiencing situational couple violence were found among the general population.

The term *battering* generated significant debate in this field with a number of researchers unable to agree on a common definition (Straus, 1999). There are those who claim that it refers to a pattern of intimidation, coercive control and oppression

(Levinson, 1989, Pence & Paymar, 1993, Stark, 1996) while others argue batterers' frequently resort to physical assault in order to dominate their partner (Pence & Paymar, 1993). The application of this term to women who perpetrated domestic violence toward men caused a great deal of controversy (Straus, 1999). That stemmed from the fact that traditionally it is men, not women, who are allowed the power to dominate and control their intimate partner (Straus, 1999). Due to the fact that the majority of batterer intervention programmes are based on addressing this historical privilege, it is deemed inappropriate to label women as batterers (Straus, 1999). As a consequence, a number of professionals have come under fire for placing women in those groups (Straus, 1999).

There is considerable disagreement among researchers as to whether they should adopt a broad or narrow definition of partner violence for women. They fear that they run the risk of embracing either a grossly inaccurate understanding of women's violence or one which acknowledges the context of cultural norms that define men and women's gender roles differently (Straus, 1999). For the purpose of this research and while holding those definitions in mind, the Home Office (2013) variant underpins the term 'domestic violence' as it is used throughout this thesis. This definition was selected on the basis that it was not restrictive and seemed to encompass a broad range of abusive behaviours, which fits with the exploratory nature of this research.

THE FOCUS ON MALE PERPETRATED ACTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
AND THE EMERGING EVIDENCE OF FEMALE PERPETRATORS.

There is a large body of research which shows that, despite the inclusive wording of the current definition, domestic violence is regarded as an entirely male province (Hamberger & Potente, 1995; Messer, Maughan, Quinton, Taylor, 2004; Miller & Meloy, 2006; Mirrlees-Black & Byron, 1999; Rennison & Welchans, 2000). There is overwhelming evidence which points to domestic violence as predominantly perpetrated by men (Hamberger & Potente, 1995; Messer, Maughan, Quinton, Taylor, 2004; Mirrlees-Black & Byron, 1999; Rennison & Welchans, 2000). Those findings could explain why the literature seems to exclude female perpetrators yet has an abundant number of studies which use samples of men (Dutton, 1996; Hamberger & Hastings, 1991). However, Home Office figures released in 2014 revealed that 7.3% of women and 5.0% of men had experienced domestic violence within the last year. Furthermore, some researchers have claimed that 25-30% of all domestic violence is perpetrated by women (Archer, 2000; McLeod, 1984). With an estimated 800,000 male victims, female perpetrated domestic violence seemed worthy of some attention (McLeod, 1984).

The silence that surrounds the topic of female perpetrated domestic violence has persisted despite growing evidence which shows that men and women perpetrate violence in intimate partner contexts (Shupe, Stacey & Hazlewood, 1987, p.46). There is also evidence that female perpetrated domestic violence occurs among same sex couples (Hamberger & Renzetti, 1996; Lie & Gentlewarrier, 1991) which adds further doubt to the claim(s) that women do not commit domestic violence (Straus & Gelles, 1988). The reluctance to engage with the topic is thought to be fuelled by the fact that the whole arena of women's violence is so discomfoting (Goux, 1992; Grossman & Bart, 1978; Laframboise, 1998; Pleck, Pleck, Pearson,

1998; Welldon, 2011). For instance, Welldon (2010) highlighted that it is not unusual for domestic violence to be considered far more shocking when the body that has perpetrated the violence is a female one. Therefore, any attempt to discuss the issue is often diverted, resisted or dismissed (Laframboise, 1998; Pearson, 1998; Pleck, Pleck, Grossman & Bart, 1978).

Concerns are rife that investigating the phenomenon of female perpetrated domestic violence could impede the services that are currently offered to female victims (Felson, 2002; Fontes, 2002; Straus, 2007). Others warn that through acknowledging female perpetrated domestic violence we might inadvertently condone violence toward women (Fontes, 2002; Shupe, Stacey & Hazlewood, 1987; Straus, 2007). It has even been argued that male perpetrated domestic violence is far more injurious therefore female violence does not warrant the attention (Arias & Johnson; 1989; Greenblat, 1983; Macchietto, 1992; Makepeace, 1986; O'Keefe, 1997; Pizzey, Shapiro, 1982; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). With those fears circulating, it is possible to imagine how readily female perpetrated domestic violence is ignored (Cook, 1997).

Turning our backs on this phenomenon however could be ill-advised, and the impact of domestic violence is well documented (Barnett, 2001; Jones & Horan, 1997; Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg, Zwi, Lozano, 2002; Sonkin, Martin & Walker, 1985). The repercussions can include an array of serious psychological and physical injuries that a number of victims find hard to overcome (Barnett, 2001; Jones & Horan, 1997; Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg, Zwi, Lozano, 2002; Sonkin, Martin & Walker, 1985). Recent evidence has shown that male victims suffer depression,

anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of the actions inflicted upon them by an abusive female partner (Buzawa, Austin, Bannon & Jackson, 2004; Callahan, Tolman & Saunders, 2003; Greif Green, McLaughlin, Berglund, Gruber, Sampson, Zaslavsky, Kessler, 2010; Nijenhuis, 2015; Nijenhuis & Van den Hart, 2011).

A number of studies indicate that male victims perceive women's violence as frightening despite being shrouded in the myth that they find it humorous, trivial and ineffectual (Burke, Stets & Pirouette-Good, 1988; Saunders, 1988, Cook, 2009; Currie, 1998; Henley & Harman, 1985; Hines, Brown & Dunning, 2007; Hines & Douglas, 2010/2011; Migliaccio, 2001; Stark & McEvoy, 1970; Steinmetz, 1978, Pagelow, 1985). Media representations of violent women have compounded this myth and it is likely that the majority of us are familiar with the cartoon images of an angry woman trying to hit her uncooperative husband with a frying pan. There is also evidence that male victims account for a third of the deaths that result from incidents of domestic violence that are perpetrated by women (Bacon & Lansdowne, 1982; Browne, 1987; Browne, 1993; Catalano, 2006; Gatton, 2010; George, 1994; Harvey, 2008; Kray, 2003; Lent 1985; Maguigan, 1991; Mezey, 1977; Nutall, Greaves, Smith, 1989; Rennison, 2000; Straus, 2005; Weis, 2001). As a result of those findings, a number of researchers have encouraged society to take heed of the fact that female perpetrated domestic violence does occur (Archer, 2000; Cook, 1997).

It was not until the United Kingdom's Police Force revised their local arrest policies, that a change in attitude toward female perpetrated domestic violence

started to take place (Frye, Haviland & Rajah, 2007; Hovmand, Ford, Flom, Kyriakakis, 2007). An increasing number of female perpetrators of domestic violence were convicted after police officers were instructed to arrest any perpetrator of domestic violence following a call, rather than decipher who the main aggressor was at the scene (Frye, Haviland & Rajah, 2007; Hovmand, Ford, Flom & Kyriakakis, 2007). As the number of women convicted for perpetrating domestic violence began to climb in the UK from 806 in 2004/2005 to 3,494 in 2009/10, (Home Office, 2010), so too did our interest in this phenomenon and it was slowly treated as having greater significance (Archer, 2000; Melton & Belknap, 2003).

The increase in the number of women arrested for domestic violence led some researchers to claim there is a population of women who are the dominant aggressors (Bland & Orn, 1986; Lewis, Travea & Fremouw, 2002; Mills, 2005; Wight & Myers, 1986). This heterogeneous population were likely to be married, cohabiting and under the age of 30 with a low IQ (Abel, 2001; Henning, Jones, Holdford, 2003; Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, Fagan, Newman, Silva, 1997; Straus, 1980; Sutor, Pillemer & Straus, 1990). Furthermore, it has been noted that a fearful attachment style, personality problems including borderline personality disorder and substance misuse are salient characteristics among this group (Carney & Buttell, 2005; Carney, Buttell & Dutton, 2007; Caspi, Newman, Fagan, Silva 1997; Dunning, 2002; Dutton, 1998; Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000; Magdol, Moffitt, Jacobson & Gottman, 1998; Sonkin & Dutton, 2003; Spidel, Nicholls, Kendrick, Klein & Krapp, 2004). Crucially, the increased arrests prompted a closer investigation of the prevalence rates of female perpetrated domestic violence in

unmarried, dating and cohabiting/married samples (Lewis & Fremouw, 2000). Frequently, the rates of domestic violence perpetration were shown to be higher in the former population (Straus & Gelles, 1985).

In a large number of studies which examined the rates of female perpetrated domestic violence, victimisation and perpetration rates differed little by gender in a sample of undergraduate men ($n = 13$) and women ($n = 52$) (Nicholls, Desmarais, Spidel & Koch, 2005). Furthermore, Kwong, Bartholemew & Dutton (1999) found similar rates of violence in their research which compared samples of men ($n = 356$) and women ($n = 351$). In a review of 62 empirical studies that examined female perpetrated domestic violence, evidence of emotional, sexual and physical violence were found across adolescent, college student and adult samples (Williams & Ghandour, 2008). The findings of those studies prompted some researchers to claim that far from rarely perpetrating domestic violence in intimate partner contexts, women were in fact as violent as men (Archer, 2000).

THE GENDER SYMMETRY DEBATE.

The assertion that men and women are equally violent in intimate partner relationships has culminated in the use of the term 'gender symmetry' (Archer, 2000; Kimmel, 2002; Saunders, 2002; Straus, 1999). This controversial topic attracted criticism and is an ongoing debate in this field. The 'gender symmetry debate' has followed the growing interest and curiosity in examining the prevalence rates of female perpetrated domestic violence in heterosexual partner relationships. As intrigue has grown, the number of studies that explore the rates of female

perpetrated domestic violence has gathered pace. Consequently, a number of researchers have begun to claim that women perpetrate a similar number of violent acts compared to their male counterparts (Arias, Samios & O'Leary, 1987; Dutton, 1994; Moffit & Caspi, 1999; Steinmetz, 1977-78; Steinmetz, 1980; Steinmetz & Lucca, 1988; Straus & Gelles, 1986; Straus, Gelles & Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989).

Currently the literature boasts some 200 studies which document the equal rates of domestic violence that are perpetrated by men and women in intimate partner relationships (Fiebert, 2004). Of those, Archer's (2000) meta-analysis is perhaps the most renowned and it encompassed 82 studies along with 65,000 participants. Archer claimed he found equal rates of domestic violence perpetration among men and women as a result of his research (Archer, 2000). Other proponents of this view claimed to have similar findings and subsequently they advocated a gender neutral analysis of domestic violence perpetration (Archer, 2002; Dasgupta, 1999; Fiebert, 2004; Follingstad, Wright, Grey & Foshee 1977; Lloyd, Sebastian, 1991; Medeiros & Straus, 2006; Prospero & Kim, 2009; Straus & Douglas, 2004; Straus & Ramirez, 2007).

As researchers continued to explore men and women's comparable rates of violence, other important findings have emerged (Straus & Gelles, 1986; Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980). For example, a number of researchers began to claim that women perpetrate higher rates of domestic violence than men. In several studies it was found that female only violence occurred more frequently than males (Bernard & Bernard, Medeiros & Straus, 2006; 1983; Steinmetz & Lucca, 1988; Straus & Douglas, 2004; Straus & Ramirez, 2007). In one instance, 44% of women

compared to 31% of men admitted physically aggressing against their spouse (O'Leary, Barling, Arias, Rosenbaum, Malone, Tyree, 1989). This finding was particularly pertinent to samples of young, dating couples (Straus & Ramirez, 2007, Whitaker, Haileyesus, Swahn, & Saltzman, 2007). Indeed, female students were found to be more physically aggressive compared to male students in a recent quantitative study by Bates, Graham-Kevan & Archer (2014). In their study, female respondents reported higher levels of controlling behaviour toward their male counterparts.

Those findings led to a quantitative investigation into the severity of female perpetrated acts of domestic violence (Simonelli & Ingram, 1998). Consequently, it was reported that after following a birth cohort of 1,037 subjects (425 men and 436 women) until the age of 21, higher rates of severe violence were reportedly perpetrated by women compared to the men in the sample (Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi & Sila, 1998). Furthermore, in a recent study, Chermack, Murray, Walton, Booth, Wryobeck & Blow, 2008, argued that over one third of female participants in a substance misuse treatment programme reported perpetrating severe acts (e.g. punching, biting, using weapons) of domestic violence toward their male partners.

Studies which claim to show evidence of gender symmetry in domestic violence perpetration have been used by some to denounce women for their acts of violence (Sarantakos, 1999). There have even been attempts to challenge and dismantle the services that are offered to female victims as a result of this research (Kimmel, 2002). Other advocates of gender symmetry have used their results to challenge the view that domestic violence is a male phenomenon, or characterised by a type of

violence that is solely asymmetrical (Arias & Johnson, 1989; Cook, 1997; Dasgupta, 1999; Greenblat, 1983; O'Keefe, 1997; Pearson, 1997; Sommer, 1994; Straus & Ramirez, 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). However, critics of gender symmetry claim the injury rate is far higher when the perpetrator of that violence is male (Anderson & Struckman-Johnson, 1998; Gelles & Straus, 1988; Saunders, 2002). In 2002 Kimmel joined this debate and drew attention to the measure that was used in the studies which claimed to show evidence of gender symmetry (Kimmel, 2002).

Designed in the late 1970s by Straus, the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) and its revised version (the Conflict Tactics Scale 2) were used in a number of large scale studies, which purported to find evidence of gender symmetry in domestic violence perpetration (Straus, 1979). Kimmel described the measure as little more than a point scoring system which records the number of self-reported acts of violence committed by men and women (Kimmel, 2002). It's failing, he claimed, is that it (CTS) does not distinguish between the different forms of violence or take into account the influence of cultural and ethnic factors (Kimmel, 2002). Furthermore, Kimmel critiqued the measure for its focus on physical violence. Kimmel deemed the measures failure to include acts of emotional violence or pick up on the insidious, multifaceted nature of different forms of violence as serious, since this kind of violence can also have a devastating impact on victims (Kimmel, 2002; Straus, 1999).

Kimmel (2002) saw the measure as unable to recognise who initiated the violence or the nature of the relationship in which those acts arose. Kimmel claimed the

measure was flawed for its dependence upon self-reported acts of aggression (Kimmel, 2002). Kimmel based this concern on the findings which show that women are more likely to report their violence (Inwald, 1992) whereas male perpetrators minimise their abuse (Bernard & Bernard, 1983; Dobash, 1992; Edelson & Brygger, 1986). Principally, he was perturbed by the fact that the measure paid no attention to contextual factors or the motivation(s) behind the violence that was used by the men and women (Kimmel, 2002). Kimmel (2002) argued that by failing to identify the reasons behind women's violence, a woman who used violence in self-defence would be conflated by the scale as equivalent to the man who abused her.

The popularity of the scale (CTS) and its use in numerous quantitative studies (Arias, Samios & O'Leary, 1987; Dutton, 1994; Moffit & Caspi, 1999; Steinmetz, 1977-78; Steinmetz & Lucca, 1988; Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980; Straus & Gelles, 1986; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989) has highlighted that women seem to be active in perpetrating domestic violence toward men. However, the measures failure to take into account contextual factors and the complex dynamics that are at play between men and women is deemed problematic (Kimmel, 2002). Nevertheless, those findings have reinforced the view that an understanding of the reasons why women perpetrate domestic violence must be gained and a clearer picture as to how they perceive their behaviour could be useful. The findings from quantitative studies also indicate that this phenomenon needs to be addressed (Kernsmith, 2005; Stuart, Moore, Hellmuth, Ramsey, Kahler, 2006; Swan & Snow, 2002).

THE MOTIVATIONS AND CONTRIBUTING FACTORS BEHIND FEMALE PERPETRATED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

As a result of the studies which highlight the prevalence of female perpetrated domestic violence, female aggressors have been placed in treatment groups at different services (Capaldi & Gorman – Smith, 2003; Carney, Buttell, Dutton, 2007). Invariably, however, those groups are based on addressing what is known about male perpetrated acts of domestic violence. As such they focus on challenging the power and control dynamics that are at play (Bennett, Hsieh, Stoops, 2010; Bennett, Stoops, Flett, 2007; Bennett & Williams, 2001; Capaldi & Gorman – Smith, 2003; Carney, Buttell, Dutton, 2007; Jewell & Wormith, 2010; Klein, 2009; Shepard, 2008; World Health Organisation, 2009).

There is insufficient evidence that women perpetrate domestic violence for the same reasons as men (Campbell, Sharps, Gary, Campbell, Lopez, 2002; Carrado George, Loxam, Jones, & Templar, 1996; Dasgupta, 1999; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Kaufman-Kantor & Jasinski, 1998; Pearson, 1997; Sommer, 1996). Although there is some evidence that women use domestic violence as a way to control or gain power over their partner, those findings are limited (Bates, Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2014; Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd & Sebastian, 1991).

Quantitative studies show that frequently women report their violence was a means of self-defence (Deskeredy, Saunders, Schwartz, Alvi, 1997; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Siemieniuk, Krentz, Gish & Gill, 2010). In a qualitative study, Miller and Meloy (2006) interviewed several women and they found that a number of the

participants described their violence as a means to escape the abuse that was repeatedly levelled against them by an abusive male partner. Other studies indicate that women commit domestic violence in response to feelings of jealousy and in order to punish their partner's behaviour (Cascardi & Vivian, 1995; Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991; Kernsmith, 2005; Pearson, 1997; Sherill, Wyngarden, Bell, 2011; Stets & Hammons, 2002).

Davis, Swan, & Gambone (2012), investigated women's aggression and the connection it had with their feelings of jealousy and in particular the notion of *unrequited love*. The term unrequited love encapsulates the idea that the desire to be with another and one's feelings of love are not reciprocated. Research shows there is a strong connection between unrequited love and the use of aggression among Maori, Chinese and Japanese populations (Kofu, 2007). The literature has also documented the patterns of unrequited love in novels and folklore (David, Swan, Gambone, 2012; Swan, Gambone, Van Horn, Snow, Sullivan, 2012). Davis, Swan & Gambone (2012) argued that there is a subset of men and women who engage in persistent pursuit of a partner to such a degree that it can rise, on some occasions, to the level of legally defined stalking.

Davis, Swan & Gambone (2012), claimed that factors such as coercive control, relational goal pursuit theory and adult attachment theory are all relevant to understanding the complexity of persistent pursuit. It has been suggested that strong feelings of rejection is the most common precipitator of stalking behaviours (Spitzberg, Dutton & Kim, 2012). Other researchers claim that unwanted pursuit

behaviours can also occur in intact relationships especially those that are violent (Spitzberg et al, 2012; Logan & Walker, 2010). For instance, Logan & Walker claim that in intact relationships these behaviours often function as coercive control, which refers to a pattern of attempted control over a partner's life, money, food, relationships as well as their general whereabouts (Logan & Walker, 2010). They claim that coercion is enforced by a pattern of repeated threats, intimidation, isolation and emotional abuse and that such behaviour can be found among groups of male and female intimate partners (Logan & Walker, 2010).

There are several studies which document women's violence as arising because they did not know how to express themselves verbally (Babcock, Miller & Siard, 2003; Carrado George, Loxam, Jones, & Templar, 1996; Felson & Messner, 1998; Sarantakos, 1998; Sherill et al, 2011; Sommer, 1996; Pearson, 1997). Furthermore, some women have reported a desire to gain their partner's attention through committing their acts of domestic violence toward men (Fiebert & Gonzalez, 1997). Other studies have shown that women perpetrate domestic violence in response to feelings of fear, jealousy and their attempts to resolve family conflict (Abel, 2001; Johnson & Leone, 2005; Gelles, 2000; Leisring, 2011; Straus, 1980).

In relation to conflict resolution, there is some evidence that relationship self efficacy can protect against the development of mental health difficulties for women who experience or use violence (Sullivan, McPartland, Price, Cruza-Guet & Swan, 2013). Sullivan & Swan et al (2013) investigated whether self efficacy, specific to a woman's ability to manage various relationship problems, plays a

protective role against the development of posttraumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety. In their study they explored the experiences of 354 community based women who used and were victims of violence in their relationships. Sullivan et al (2013) found that high levels of self efficacy (i.e. a persons sense of control over their environment and belief that he/she can master challenging demands) mediated the relationship between psychological victimisation and each of the aforementioned mental health outcomes (Sullivan, McPartland, Price, Cruza-Guet & Swan, 2013).

Recent findings have illuminated that women perpetrate domestic violence toward men as a result of their fears of abandonment (Carney & Buttell, 2005; Carney, Buttell & Dutton, 2007; Dutton, 1998, Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000; Sonkin & Dutton, 2003). High levels of anxiety, attachment related difficulties and drug misuse are also shown to be aggravating factors (Bowlby, 1969; Carney & Buttell, 2005; Follingstad, Bradley, Heff & Loughlin, 2002; Henning, Jones & Holdford, 2003; Holtzworth-Munroe, Stuart, 1994; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998).

From a social learning perspective it has also been argued that women might learn to use violence as a result of their exposure to inter-parental abuse in childhood (Bandura, 1973 & 1977; Bermann, Leoendosky, 1998; Downs & Miller, 1998; Ehrensaft, Cohen, Brown, Smailes, Chen, Johnson, 2003; Ehrensaft, Moffit, Caspi, 2004; Kalmuss, 1984; Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegmueller, & Silver, 1962; Malone, Tyree & O'Leary, 1989; Straus, Gelles & Steinmatz 1980). The 'intergenerational transmission of violence' is based on this idea and has been linked with depression, anxiety and partner violence in adulthood (Dutton &

Holtworth, Munroe, 1997; Murrell, Christoff & Henning, 2007; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989, Widom, 1989).

It has been suggested that children who witness domestic violence learn how to perpetrate that in adulthood through a process named ‘modeling’ (Alexander, Moore, & Alexander, 1991; Bandura, 1962; Bandura, 1977; Cantrell, MacIntyre, Sharkey, & Thompson, 1995; Carlson, 1990; Gwartney-Gibbs, Stockard, & Bohmer, 1987; MacEwen, 1994; Marshall & Rose, 1988; O’Keefe, 1997). The term ‘modeling’ was originally coined by Bandura and encompasses the idea that human behaviour is learned through observation and that it is subsequently imitated (Bandura, 1977). However, the connection is unclear and the findings contradictory (Foo & Margolin, 1995; Straus & Gelles, 1995). For instance, family of origin violence was related to violence in adulthood in a number of studies (Cantrell, MacIntyre, Sharkey & Thompson, 1995; MacEwan, 1994; Stith, Rosen, Middleton, Busch, Lundeberg & Carlton, 1998). However, other research shows there is a weak to no correlation between them (Cappel & Heiner, 1990; MacEwan & Barling, 1988; Malone, Tyree & O’Leary, 1989; Tontodonato & Crew, 1992).

The treatment of women’s violence could be severely undermined if few attempts are made to further understand the reasons for their behaviour (Capaldi & Gorman – Smith, 2003). The predominant use of quantitative measures thus far means we know little about what women have to say about their violence or their perception(s) as to how that has occurred. A particular problem with the CTS is that it does not explore the motivations, contexts or perceptions women hold of their domestic violence toward men (Kimmel, 2002). Yet in the aftermath of studies

which have used the scale, women have been placed in treatment groups that are designed for men. Placing women in groups that are based on addressing the factors which underlie male violence, means that female violence is currently viewed through a masculine lens (Capaldi & Gorman – Smith, 2003; Carney, Buttell, Dutton, 2007).

THE LINK BETWEEN PATRIARCHY, THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER AND FEMALE PERPETRATED ACTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

There is agreement among a number of researchers that women are viewed through a male prism (Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992; Butler, 1990). The concepts of male domination and power have long been used through which to understand women's social position (Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992). In relation to domestic violence it has been claimed it is a consequence of a patriarchal society (Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992; Bograd, 1988; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Felson, 2002; Kennedy, 1993; McHugh, Livingstone & Ford, 2005). The term 'patriarchy' was coined to reflect a social system that is governed principally by male power and the majority of feminist writers tend to view domestic violence as a male activity toward women (Bograd, 1988; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Dobash & Dobash, Wilson & Daly, 1992; Dutton, 1994; Felson, 2002; Hines, Brown & Dunning, 2007; Jaffe, Lemon & Poisson, 2003; McHugh, Livingstone & Ford, 2005; Melton & Belknap, 2003; Millett, 1969; Mithell, 1971; Rubin, 1975; Welldon, 2011). It seems important to consider societal perceptions of women and their capacity to be violent and aggressive and how those ideas have evolved.

There is an extensive range of studies which highlight the problem of male violence toward female victims (Hamberger & Potente, 1995; Melton & Belknap, 2003; Messer, Maughan, Quinton, Taylor, 2004; Miller & Meloy, 2006; Mirrlees-Black & Byron, 1999; Rennison & Welchans, 2000). It has been argued that those findings have kept afloat the idea that men are socialised to believe they have the right to control women, even if that is maintained through violent means (Hines, Brown & Dunning, 2007).

The roots of patriarchy were explored by a number of researchers and Lerner claimed it is steeped in warrior culture (Lerner, 1986; Paul & Baenninger, 1991). The historical beginnings of patriarchy were believed to be a consequence of women's vulnerability during childbirth and their dependence on men for protection (Lerner, 1986). Women's reproductive function gave rise to the perception that women were closer to nature whereas men were deemed closer to culture (Brown & Jordanova, 1982; MacCormack & Strathern, 1980; Ortner, 1974; Ortner & Whitehead 1981). This state of affairs is thought to explain why men hold more active, leadership roles in society whereas women occupy roles such as those of wife and mother (Aries, 1962; Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992; Boon, 1974; Drummond, 1978; Harris, 1988; Stack, 1974; Walvin, 1982). However, detractors of this view claim that patriarchal power is not evident across all cultures (Harris, 1988; Sanday, 2004). Other critics claim that women hold significant power in the domestic domain (Pearson, 1982; Weiner, 1976). Yet few researchers have agreed and a number of writers continue to state that women are viewed as passive (Welldon, 1988).

The perception that women are passive has also fostered the claim that they are non-aggressive (Ortner & Whitehead 1981). This view has perpetuated the belief that they are suited to roles such as those of wife and mother because of their 'gentle' natures (Bjorkqvist, 1994; Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992; Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983; Frodi, Kennedy, 1993; Macaulay, Thorne, 1977). Men, by contrast, are often regarded as more aggressive compared to their female counterparts (Ardrey, 1966; Block, 1974; Eron, Huesmann, Lefkowitz & Walder, 1972; Fausto-Sterling, 1992; Gladue, 1991; Lorenz, 1970; Segall, 1989; Simon & Landis, 1991; Towson & Zanna, 1982; White, 1983; Williams & Best, 1982). It is widely believed that gender stereotypes play a central role in the maintenance of those views and the workings of patriarchal power (Brown & Jordanova, 1982; Hines, Brown & Dunning, 2007; MacCormack & Strathern, 1980; Ortner, 1974; Ortner & Whitehead, 1981).

Judith Butler has written extensively on the notion of gender stereotypes, which she claims are a consequence of language (Butler, 1990). In *Gender Trouble* Butler argues that normative ideas concerning what it means to be masculine or feminine are generated at societal level (Butler 1990; Oakley, 1972; Williams & Best, 1990). Butler highlights that those masculine and feminine traits are regarded as evidence of a 'natural' male or female core (Benhabib & Cornell, 1987; Butler, 1990) yet she proposes that those traits are merely socially constructed ideas that are projected onto sexed bodies (Butler, 1990; Gilbert & Hixon, 1991; Haslanger, 2000). From this angle, gender is a free floating phenomenon that one 'performs', through the repetition, renewal and consolidation of various social acts (Allard, Cooper, Hildebrand & Wealands, 1995; Butler, 1989). The notion of gender performance

was captured by Simone de Beauvoir (1989) when she stated “one is not born a woman, but becomes one” (p.325).

At the heart of Butler’s view of gender is the belief that the traits and characteristics that are assumed to be typically masculine might as easily inhabit a female body as they do a male one (Butler, 1993; Harris, 1991). Butler’s work deconstructs the view that gender is a coherent, seamless and reified identity (Benjamin, 1998; Butler, 1993). Furthermore, it could debunk claims that women are “naturally” non-violent or incapable of perpetrating domestic violence toward men (Kennedy, 1993).

There is some evidence that societal norms contribute to women’s complex relationship with anger and aggression (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1982; Miller, 1990; Ogle, Maier-Katkin & Bernard, 1995). For instance, societal norms are believed to inhibit women’s expression of anger and aggression, which they are thought to internalise instead (Ogle, Maier-Katkin & Bernard, 1995). As a consequence, it is believed that women are prevented from developing culturally approved guidelines for the regulation of their anger and that they develop a type of restricted affect (Ehrensaft et al, 2004; Ogle, Maier-Katkin & Bernard, 1995). Therefore, a number of researchers have claimed that women internalise high levels of pent up provocation which eventually surpasses their inhibition threshold and results in an explosion of anger (Megargee, 1966; Ogle, Maier-Katkin & Bernard, 1995).

It seems important to consider how gender stereotypes which prescribe women the role of gentle, nurturing care-giver complicate the task of recognising women who

are violent (Butler, 2009). For example, Butler claims that violence among women “does not conform to our established understanding of things” (Butler, 2009, p. 9). A number of researchers also state that when a violent woman is acknowledged she is often deemed ‘flawed’ or it is claimed that she has ‘faulty biology’ (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). In essence, violent women are perceived as falling outside the realm of cultural norms of femininity (Naaman, 2007; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; Butler, 2009). At the extreme, they are seen as ‘deviant’, defunct or they are promptly labelled a “monster” (Naaman, 2007). The hegemonic narratives that surround violent women ensure the notion of femininity is kept intact (Naaman, 2007). For instance, violent women are perceived as going against gender norms or they are labelled as “unwell” (Naaman, 2007; Banner, 2008). Those labels reinforce the notion that women are generally “fluid, inconsistent and irrational, whereas men are deemed solid, permanent and rational” subjects (Oliver, 2007, p.38; Agra & Romero; 2012)

Gender stereotypes are believed to play a central role in maintaining the gender binary and men’s existing greater power over women (Butler, 1997). Foucault and Butler elucidate how power operates, which they describe as pressing on the individual from the outside (Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1977). However, power also comes to constitute the subjects self-identity when it is internalised in a psychic form (Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1977). Foucault and Butler claim that power is not only deemed as subordinating and relegating the individual to a lower order, it plays a fundamental role in the formation of the subject (Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1977).

Other writers who have examined the role of patriarchy claim that men's greater social power works to exclude women (Benjamin, 1992; Butler, 1997; Butler, 1990; Dimen, 1991). In *The Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray explores this idea and she states that women occupy the role of 'Other' (Irigaray, 1985). With reference to Lacanian theory, Irigaray views male power as signified by the phallus and the little girl's recognition that she lacks one. Irigaray claims that in her search for a power that compares to the phallus, the woman is filled with a masculine discourse since that is all she finds around her (Irigaray, 1985). However, this language is based on excluding women and refers to the masculine subject (Irigaray, 1985).

Irigaray claimed that a woman's own speech is destroyed after she is filled with a masculine discourse (Irigaray, 1974). As a consequence, the woman has no option but to mimic the masculine subject if she wants to be heard (Irigaray, 1974). However, the language that she attempts to mimic is based on excluding her thus her own desires can never be fully expressed (Ardener, 1975; Irigaray, 1974; Kant, 1784; Kennedy, 1993; Worrall, 1990). Irigaray believed that as a result of this process the woman is repressed (Irigaray, 1974). Furthermore, she claimed that the woman is not only 'Other' but "his other" and this statement implies that the woman functions to serve the security of the male subject (Irigaray, 1974). On the concept of passivity, Irigaray claimed that the masculine subject projects that into the woman, where it is subsequently defined as feminine (Irigaray, 1974).

The work of Irigaray and Butler is founded on the belief that the masculine aims to keep the feminine within certain confines (Butler, 1990; Irigaray, 1985). Irigaray claims that as a consequence, women are readily equated with the de-valued side of

society in which the notion of “equal citizens” does not exist (Irigaray, 1985). This idea belongs to a large body of work which examines the concept of citizenship and the view that women are forced to live outside that frame (Marshall, 1950; Plummer, 2003).

Despite the vast body of work on patriarchy, the steady rise in the number of women arrested for perpetrating domestic violence toward men has encouraged feminist writers to acknowledge this group (Archer, 2000; Bannon & Jackson, 2004; Buzawa, Austin, Callahan, Tolman & Saunders, 2003; Catalano, 2006; Cook, 1997; George, 1994; Hettrich & O’Leary, 2007; Pagelow, 1985; Straus, 2000; Straus, 2005; Rennison, 2000). Feminist writers have responded with the claim that women perpetrate domestic violence as a means of self-defence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992; Dutton, 1994; Loseke & Kurz, 2005; Saunders, 1988).

The feminist view of female perpetrated domestic violence is that it occurs as a consequence of patriarchy and male perpetrated control (Belknap & Melton, 2005; Bernhard, 2000; Brand & Kidd, 1986; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992; Dutton, 1994; Kurz, 1997; Loseke & Kurz, 2005; Saunders, 1988; Tutty, 1999; Walker, 1984). A number of feminist writers have repeatedly defined women’s violence as resistance to the abuse that is meted out by men (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Dutton, 1994). Johnson & Ferraro (2005) argue that ‘violent resistance’ can be distinguished from the concept of self-defence. They claim that ‘violent resistance’ occurs in response to a perceived threat and that it tends to happen in isolation (Johnson & Ferraro, 2005). In contrast, self-defence

stems from a far greater pattern of control and repeated manipulation (Johnson & Ferraro, 2005). The 'battered woman syndrome' encapsulates those women who have endured this type of abuse (Walker, 1979). Gilligan notes it is the repeated shame and humiliation that a battered woman is subjected to, which sees her hit back (Gilligan, 1996).

It is important to acknowledge that women who perpetrate domestic violence might do so in self-defence, as it has been shown to increase the risk of severe retaliative assaults from men (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). However, critics of the feminist position state that viewing all women's violence as self-defence denies women agency (Swan & Snow, 2002; Walker, 1984). They argue that it ensures female perpetrated domestic violence is viewed through a masculine lens and denies women are capable of aggressing against a spouse without some form of provocation from men first (Nolet-Bos, 1999). Other writers claim that viewing all women's violence as tantamount to self-defence maintains our perception of women as passive (Babcock, Miller & Siard, 2003; Kennedy, 1993). Furthermore, it has been highlighted that a number of the studies which claim women perpetrate domestic violence as a means of self defence, recruited their samples from hostels and refuges (Cascardi & Vivian, 1995, Dasgupta, 1999; Hamberger, 1994). In those studies, the women who took part were also victims of domestic violence, which increased the likelihood that their violence was perpetrated in self defence (Cascardi & Vivian, 1995, Dasgupta, 1999; Hamberger, 1994).

Critical research offers insights into some of the factors which could be linked with women's violence and aggression. Irigaray's work and theories of patriarchy

illuminate how women are rendered to a position of passivity and come to occupy the role of 'Other' (Irigaray, 1974). Steinmetz (1975) argued that as a result of the women's movement, a number of women realised that they could fight back and that retaliating against male perpetrated control was an option for them. Consequently, a number of researchers have begun to claim that female perpetrated domestic violence is an attempt by those women to level the patriarchal system in which they live (Steinmetz, 1975). However, increasing evidence of female perpetrated domestic violence among same-sex couples adds doubt to the claim that all women's violence is self-defence or a response to male perpetrated control (Bologna, Waterman & Dawson, 1987; Hammond, 1988; Jasinki, Williams, Finkelhor, 1998; Kelly & Warshafsky, 1987; Warshafsky, 1987; Kanuha, 1990; Lawson, 2003; Lie & Gentlewarrier, 1991; Lie, Schilit, Bush, Montagne, Reynes, 1991; Merrill, 1998; Renzetti, 1992; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Those findings and the emerging evidence which shows that women are violent toward non-violent partners suggests that self-defence may not be the entire picture (Ehrensaft, Moffit & Caspi, 2004; Lewis, Travea & Fremouw, 2002; Mills, 2003; Stets & Straus, 1990).

SECTION SIX: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND FEMALE PERPETRATED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

There are few studies which have sought to explore female perpetrators accounts of domestic violence toward men and their perception of that, including their understanding as to how those acts arose. However, Virginia Eatough examined women's anger and their anger related experiences in relationships with men (Eatough, 2008). In her study, semi structured interviews with five women were

analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Eatough, 2008). A purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit participants from the general population. Analysis of the data illuminated three key themes including perceptual confusion, awareness of bodily change and perceptions of unfairness and injustice. This phenomenological study was pivotal in raising our awareness of women's anger and their capacity to express that in intimate partner contexts (Averill, 1983).

In a particularly relevant piece of research, women's interpretations of their domestically violent behaviour toward male partners were explored by Miller & Meloy (2006). In this study grounded theory was used to analyse the data (Miller & Meloy, 2006). Miller & Meloy's (2006) study was based on group observations of ninety five women in the context of treatment. The female participants in this study had all been convicted for their acts of domestic violence prior to entering treatment. As a consequence, all of the women were placed in female 'batterer' treatment programmes and Miller & Meloy observed three groups over the course of their study (Miller & Meloy, 2006).

Through observing the women, Miller & Meloy (2006) found that a number of the participants reported using violence in self-defence. Furthermore, the participants described their violence as a means to escape the abuse that was repeatedly levelled against them by a controlling male partner (Miller & Meloy, 2006). Miller & Meloy (2006) emphasised that although these women had been placed in 'batterer' treatment programmes, that only five of the participants had used behaviours toward a male partner that were tantamount to 'aggressive violence'. Miller & Meloy (2006) claimed that the majority of the women used behaviours that could

not be construed as 'battering' or aimed at gaining power and control over a partner. In essence they found that for the majority of the women, their violence was a 'frustration response' or an act of self-defence. In addition, Miller & Meloy revealed that most of the women described their violence as a way to 'get away from' a partner and that it occurred as a result of them trying to leave and avoid further violence from a partner. Furthermore, in some instances, the women reported their violence was a means of protecting their children from an abusive male partner (Miller & Meloy, 2006). Miller & Meloy (2006) used their findings to argue that 'treating' women's violence as equivalent or similar to male perpetrated abuse is problematic.

In a further relevant study, Flinck & Paavilainen (2010) used open ended interviews with twenty four women all of whom had a history of perpetrating domestic violence toward men. Flinck & Paavilainen (2010) were particularly interested in exploring the women's perceptions of their domestically violent behaviour in intimate partner relationships. In this study, women aged 19 to 58 were interviewed about the varying degrees of violence they had perpetrated toward men. The women were recruited via different methods including contact with various agencies and purposeful, snowball sampling (Flinck & Paavilainen, 2010). In this study, the interviews were conducted with the women across a four year period and they were interviewed twice at intervals of 1 to 2 years (Flinck & Paavilainen, 2010). Flinck & Paavilainen (2010) analysed the data using a descriptive phenomenological method. They attempted to explore the subjective and unique meanings of women's violent behaviour, through paying attention to the

everyday experiences these women had and their perception of their acts of violence.

Three key themes emerged as a result of the study conducted by Flinck & Paavilainen including: rejection of violence, justification of violence, and awakening and moving on (Flinck & Paavilainen, 2010). Rejection of violence referred to the participants perceptions of their verbally and psychologically abusive behaviour as non-violent (Flinck & Paavilainen, 2010). The findings of this study showed that the women felt they were acting properly and morally in their relationships with their male partners. It was found that the women regarded their actions as unimportant, which they connected with their perception that their violence had not caused physical or psychological injury to a spouse.

In addition, Flinck & Paavilainen (2010) found that the women shared a sense of intellectual superiority toward their male partners. It was also shown that the women were shocked by their violent thoughts and their violent actions. Furthermore, this study found that the women were concerned about their desire to harm a male partner and it was revealed that they wanted to avoid the possibility of violence within themselves even if that meant leaving the relationship (Flinck & Paavilainen, 2010). In particular the theme 'justification of violence' revealed the women's beliefs that their violence had been a justified response against male perpetrated abuse and a reaction to dishonesty, provocation and the man's violent actions. Interestingly, this study revealed that the female participants believed it was reasonable to punish and take revenge on a male partner through their acts of violence (Flinck & Paavilainen, 2010). The findings also illuminated that the

participants felt they were forced to take justice into their own hands and that they used violence as a way to set limits and protect their personal space (Flinck & Paavilainen, 2010). In the theme ‘awakening and moving on’ the women expressed their feelings of guilt for their violence and their desire for therapy, space and some sense of change in their lives (Flinck & Paavilainen, 2010).

THE AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

This study presents a qualitative exploration of female perpetrators accounts of domestic violence toward men and their perception of that, including their understanding as to how those acts arose. Studies which explore the phenomenon of female perpetrated domestic violence have mainly been quantitative. Quantitative investigations have offered insight into the prevalence of female perpetrated domestic violence toward men. Those studies have created a slow but steady shift in our awareness of the violence that is perpetrated by women and alerted us to the fact that this phenomenon does exist. The findings from quantitative studies have been used to claim that men and women perpetrate equal rates of domestic violence in intimate partner contexts. However, a closer investigation of the scale that was used in those studies has revealed that a number of important factors were overlooked.

Although quantitative research is important, it tells us little about women’s perception(s) of their violence or their understanding as to how that has occurred. Furthermore, a number of quantitative studies have failed to explore the context of women’s violence (Kimmel, 2002). Currently there is a perception that women

perpetrate domestic violence for the same reasons as men. Yet the evidence which supports those claims is limited. In addition, female perpetrated domestic violence is often seen as a consequence of male perpetrated abuse. However, the historical privilege of men's greater social power over women and the insidious nature of other forms of violence cannot be captured by the measures that are used in quantitative studies.

Despite the assumption that women do not perpetrate domestic violence without some form of provocation from men first, it has been argued that this is not always the case. For instance, emerging evidence has revealed that self defence may not be the entire picture or account for all instances of domestic violence toward men. However, few researchers have sought to access the actual voices of these women or illuminate what their perceptions of perpetrating domestic violence toward men have been. In addition, the assumptions that are circulating about women's violence mean that addressing the problem is difficult. As mentioned previously, this study aims to explore female perpetrators accounts of their domestic violence toward men and their perception of that, including their understanding as to how those acts arose. In contrast with previous studies, which have largely used methods such as group observation (Miller & Meloy, 2006) the form of data collection that was employed in this study was believed to offer women a voice and therefore an opportunity to share their experiences in greater depth.

This research has a focus on one specific question:

1. How do female perpetrators of domestic violence perceive their violence and account for that arising?

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with an introduction to my personal epistemological position. Following that, it provides a rationale for qualitative research. This chapter will then explore; an introduction to interpretative phenomenological analysis, phenomenology and hermeneutics, IPA in favour of other qualitative methods, recruitment, procedure, ethical considerations, data collection and data analysis. This chapter concludes with a reflective component.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITION

This study aims to explore female perpetrators accounts of their domestic violence toward men and their perception of that, including their understanding as to how those acts arose. There is a paucity of research which explores women's experiences of perpetrating domestic violence using qualitative approaches in the literature. A qualitative inquiry aims to bridge the gap through offering a deeper, far richer exploration of women's perceptions of perpetrating domestic violence toward men.

As a counselling psychologist trainee, I feel I am committed to engaging with clients about their subjective experience and feelings. In particular, I am curious about their relationships, which are defined based on their own personal and unique

experiences. There is an emphasis in counselling psychology on placing the person and their subjective experiences central (Brammer, 1989). In that regard, I aim to listen to clients with openness and I respect that they have a desire to share their experiences in their own terms.

I also hold the belief that our experience is interwoven and connected with our surrounding environment and other individuals in our world. As such, I hold the view that our experience is constructed socially, linguistically, culturally and historically. In addition, I believe that meaning is derived from our experience and that it varies from one person to another. Counselling psychology has a focus on helping clients find meaning (Brammer, 1989). In the field of counselling psychology it has been argued that meaning is co-constructed between therapist and client due to the interaction that unfolds between them and the coming together of their own worlds (Brammer, 1989; Edie, 1962; Lavery, 2003).

On the basis of those views, I felt that a critical realist and constructionist epistemological position underpins this research. The term 'epistemology' is used to encapsulate the relationship between knowledge, the knower and the claims about the truth and the production of that knowledge (Ponterotto, 2005). Critical realism suggests that reality independently exists however it argues that people's perceptions and experiences of that reality are subjective and will vary (Bhaskar, 1978). Therefore, under the term critical realism is the notion that differences exist in the meanings individuals attach to experiences because different aspects of a reality are experienced (Bhaskar, 1978). Critical realism postulates that reality is considered to be an interpretation of what people think about experiences (Archer,

1995). From this perspective, a critical realist approach argues that reality has stable features that are independent from an individual's conceptualisations (Bhaskar, 1978). Furthermore, a critical realist stance acknowledges that the world and the knowledge people have of that world will differ and it appreciates the value of different perspectives of a certain phenomenon (Archer, 1995). This perspective fits with my own view(s) of the world and it is aligned with the field of counselling psychology. As already mentioned, counselling psychology is renowned for placing the person and their subjective experiences central and it has a commitment to helping clients find meaning.

Constructionism takes the view that "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998, p.42). In short, a constructionist approach acknowledges that our perceptions and our experiences are shaped by the contexts that we live in (Lyons, 2007). This means that constructionism rejects the notion of a universal truth (Kvale, 1996). Instead a constructionist paradigm proposes that meaning is constructed and subjective yet it also argues there is no one true interpretation but rather, multiple interpretations of events (Bhaskar, 1978; Crotty, 1998; Krauss, 2005; Madil, Jordan, Shirley, 2000).

In this section I have made reference to phenomenology and social constructionism and it seems pertinent to consider the relationship between the two. Phenomenology is primarily concerned with how meaning comes into the world and it rests on the notion that human reality is intentional (Heidegger, 1889). It has

been argued that phenomenologists seek to distinguish between something that is culturally inherited and something in our experience that is ‘authentic’ and fresh (Heidegger, 1889). Social constructionism is concerned with the content and context of our experience and asserts that we create our reality through our thoughts and beliefs (Heidegger, 1889).

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH RATIONALE

I selected a qualitative methodology for this research. Broadly speaking, qualitative research can be defined as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Straus & Corbin, 1990, p.17). In contrast with quantitative methods, qualitative approaches seek to produce findings that arise from real world settings where the phenomenon of interest “unfolds naturally” (Patton, 2001, p.39). My decision to select this method was due, in part, to the lack of qualitative studies which explore the phenomenon of female perpetrated domestic violence (Campbell, 2008). It seems that, to date, the majority of studies in this domain have largely failed to access the voices of female perpetrators of domestic violence. It has been argued that this is due, in part, to the structured reporting methods that tend to be used in quantitative studies (Nevonen & Broberg, 2000).

Nevonen & Broberg (2000) claim that in quantitative studies participants can only comment on what they are asked to respond to, which can produce a very fragmented picture. Several researchers have acknowledged the importance of increasing qualitative research in this field since they claim that it can arrive at an

in-depth, detailed understanding of the phenomenon that is under investigation (Flinck & Paavilainen, 2010; Hester & Westmarland, 2005; Kimmel, 2002). I certainly hoped that I would achieve this as a result of the study.

In choosing a qualitative method I considered that positivist paradigms propose that meaning is discovered and objective (Krauss, 2005). For instance, one researcher writes that quantitative methodologies are based on the assumption that the inquirer can observe phenomena objectively “as they really are” (Philipps, 1990, p.31). In contrast, qualitative paradigms are based on the supposition that meaning is subjective and constructed (Krauss, 2005; Westerman, 2006). Furthermore, a number of researchers have argued that qualitative approaches enable the researcher to gain in-depth insight into subjective, personal experiences in ways which quantitative methodologies simply cannot reach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Having chosen a qualitative method for this research, I acknowledged that the data tends not to be collected so that it can be generalised to the wider population (Flowers, Smith, Sheeran & Beail, 1997; Koch, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, it is assumed that the data will tell us something about the life worlds of the small group of individuals that are involved in the study (Koch, 1995; Tourini & Coyle, 2002). A further distinction between quantitative and qualitative modes of inquiry is the emphasis on the relationship between the researcher and the participant, which is deemed significant in the latter method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). On the basis that meaning is co-constructed, the findings that are gleaned from a qualitative study are therefore believed to be created through the interaction

that unfolds between the researcher and the participant and the process is viewed as a collaborative and complex endeavour (Laverty, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Fundamental to qualitative research is the belief that the researcher and participant contribute their thoughts to the research process (Lopez & Willis, 2004). In fact it is widely accepted that the researcher's perspective affects the entire process of the study (Golsworthy & Coyle, 2001). This opinion has led a number of researchers to state that the researcher must be clear about the assumptions and beliefs that they hold about their topic from the onset of the study (Elliot, Fischer & Rennie, 1999). The importance of this transparency is reinforced by the view that the results of qualitative research reflect the researcher as much as they do the participant (Salmon, 2003).

I felt that the ability to be clear about my own assumptions and perspectives on the topic of female perpetrated domestic violence was an important issue for me to consider prior to starting the study. Although I have never been violent toward an intimate partner, I can imagine how this might arise in certain situations for some women. Furthermore, I have often thought that female perpetrated domestic violence could have a link with the pressure and stress that are involved in family life. In particular, the difficulty coping with financial pressure or the responsibility of raising a family might play a part. I have also assumed that some women perpetrate domestic violence as a means of self-defence. However, I have often wondered what the other reasons behind women's violence could be and I am curious about the diversity of their experiences.

Prior to engaging in the interviews, it was important for me to reflect on my capacity to listen and be able to sit with the women as they shared their experiences. At the start of my research, I found myself questioning the wisdom of choosing a topic with such significance. At the onset, I struggled with the reactions that I encountered from other people when I discussed my area of research. Frequently, this was met with silences or attempts to change the topic of conversation at speed. As a consequence, I began to feel somewhat uncomfortable about sharing my thoughts on the subject.

It occurred to me that the reactions I observed could indicate that this topic is still taboo. In that regard, the reactions I encountered served to highlight that there is something disconcerting for most about engaging with this phenomenon. This reminded me of the literature which states that the topic of female perpetrated domestic violence is often dismissed or met with resistance (Laframboise, 1998; Pearson, 1998; Pleck, Pleck, Grossman & Bart, 1978).

As a female researcher it seemed vital for me to reflect on my own relationship with anger, aggression and violence. Although I have not perpetrated domestic violence toward a male partner, I am aware that my relationship with anger has been difficult. This could be due to childhood experiences and my tendency to adopt a kind of peacemaker role. I have experienced mixed feelings about what it means for women to be angry and aggressive. Furthermore, I am aware of the general discord between anger and aggression and the beliefs about stereotypical femininity in society. I am aware that I have felt personally affected by those conflicting areas at various points throughout my life.

Specifically, I felt strongly that female perpetrated domestic violence was an important yet neglected area of research. A particular advantage of qualitative methods is that they help to open up areas of research that are not well understood (McLeod, Craufurd, Booth, 2002; Petalas, Hastings, Nash, Reilly, Dowey, et al, 2009; Quin, Clare, Ryan, & Jackson, 2009; Smith, 2004; Willig, 2008). Furthermore, we have seen from the literature that women are also deemed a marginalised group in society (Marshall, 1950; Plummer, 2003). It has been argued that qualitative approaches help to amplify the voices of those groups (McLeod, Craufurd, Booth, 2002). In this study, this was achieved through offering the women a space in which they could voice their experiences in their own terms (McLeod, Craufurd, Booth, 2002; Smith, 2005).

In essence, qualitative methods are useful for examining the lived experience of a group of participants (Smith, 2004). In particular, such methods are concerned with extrapolating a degree of understanding with regard to a phenomenon that might otherwise seem enigmatic or confusing (Stenbacka, 2001). Qualitative approaches have a particular focus on how individuals make sense of their life experiences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). In that regard, a qualitative method seemed to fit with the aims of this research, as it seeks to explore women's accounts of their domestic violence toward men and their perception of that, including their understanding as to how those acts arose. There is agreement among a number of researchers that qualitative methods can illuminate how a person makes sense of their experience(s) and what that experience means to them (Bryman, 1985, Smith, 2004). It therefore tallies that qualitative methods acknowledge the depth, richness, uniqueness and variability of human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It was

my view that a qualitative method would be a useful approach to engaging with the detailed, verbatim accounts of several women who had perpetrated domestic violence toward a male partner. Due to the emphasis in qualitative methods on depth as opposed to breadth of information, these approaches tend to use much smaller samples compared to the large numbers that are typically used in quantitative studies (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS (IPA)

The particular qualitative method that I chose for this research was interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). In keeping with the aims of the study, IPA is committed to an exploration of people's life worlds through their narratives and how they make sense of their experiences (Smith, Larkin & Flowers, 2009; Dilthey, 1976). Importantly, IPA is influenced by social constructionism (Burr, 2003). This suggests that although IPA is concerned with personal experience, it acknowledges context and the interaction between psychological as well as social factors (Barker, Pistrang & Elliot, 2002; Burr, 2003). IPA seeks to generate in-depth information about a participant's lived experience through engaging with their detailed, nuanced accounts (Smith, 2004). Because IPA can engage with data in this way, it seemed an appropriate method for exploring the complex phenomenon of female perpetrated domestic violence.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis is often used in British Psychology and it can be found in a burgeoning and increasingly wide variety of studies (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Clare, 2003; Duncan, Hart, Scoular & Brigg, 2001). Formerly

associated with health psychology, this method has since been used in social, clinical and counselling psychology to date (Smith, 2004). IPA pays particular attention to participants' experience, perceptions, understanding and views (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). With its focus on first person accounts, IPA enables the researcher to get a sense of what it might be like for the participant to be in their situation or their particular context (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Bryman, 1988; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Essentially this is because IPA is an approach that can explore, in detail, the processes through which a participant makes sense of their experience (Chapman & Smith, 2002). Furthermore, it rests on the assumption that individuals seek to interpret their experiences into a form that is understandable to them (Chapman & Smith, 2002). Therefore, a particular strength of IPA is that it can provide insights as well as offer rich descriptions of a person's experience (Steyaert, 1997).

The inductive element in IPA, offers greater scope for unanticipated findings to emerge (Barker, Pistrang & Elliot, 2002; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Crucially, IPA moves beyond description and involves an interpretive activity and engagement with the data (Smith, Jarman, & Osborne, 1999). The term IPA captures its dual facets and alludes to the joint reflection that is required of both researcher and participant (Conrad, 1987). It has been argued that the insights or "insider perspective" that can be gained through the research is contingent upon the strength of the interpretative actions of the researcher (Conrad, 1987). This highlights that IPA is not only bound by the participants ability to articulate themselves but that it also depends on the researchers capacity to reflect and analyse their thoughts subsequently (Conrad, 1987). With this in mind, it follows that the thorough

analysis of data transcripts is a central process and key phase in IPA (Smith, 1996). It is through the process of data analysis that unexpected aspects of the phenomena can arise (Smith, 1996).

The idiographic approach in IPA allows the researcher to say something about each participant in the study as well as something about the group as a whole (Smith, Harre, Van Langenhove, 1995; Smith, 2004). It has already been noted that IPA has a focus on verbatim accounts, which highlights the role of language (Smith, 2003). IPA gives credence to language as having representational validity as opposed to constructing reality. Therefore, experience is viewed as a product of cognition and perception in IPA. Furthermore, IPA acknowledges that there is no such thing as objective reality because experiences are perceived differently by different people. It is accepted in IPA, that objectivity is influenced by social interactions between social beings. However, IPA rests on the assumption that meaningful interpretations of conceptions can be achieved through the thorough process of data analysis (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

PHENOMENOLOGY AND HERMENEUTICS

With its roots in phenomenology, IPA stems from this philosophical approach, which is concerned with human experience (Langdridge, 2007; Smith, 2009). Willig believed that phenomenology enables the researcher to investigate the diversity and variability of human experience (Willig, 2001). In particular, it has been argued that phenomenology rests on the notion that the world is subjectively experienced according to an individual's cultural, historical and social contexts

(Willig, 2001). Drawing from symbolic interactionism, IPA acknowledges that human beings are not passive perceivers of their surrounding environment or observers of an objective reality (Chapman & Smith, 2002). In contrast, it is accepted in IPA that individuals come to interpret and understand their world through formulating their own stories in a way that makes sense to them (Chapman & Smith, 2002). Like phenomenology, IPA aims to capture something of an individual's unique experience in their own world (Smith, 2004; Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009).

A distinction has been made between descriptive and interpretive phenomenology with the former based on describing rather than offering explanations (Langdridge, 2007). A descriptive phenomenology seeks to reveal the general meaning structures of a given phenomenon while staying close to what the participant has said (Giorgi, 1970; Mohanty, 1992). IPA moves beyond this form of phenomenology with its interpretive element (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009). Heidegger claimed the interpretive element seeks to reveal the hidden or underlying meaning(s) behind the participants' descriptions (Heidegger, 1962). This is deemed essential because meanings are not always apparent to the participant however they can be gleaned from the narratives that are produced by them (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Based on an interpretive phenomenology, IPA recognises the researcher within the analytic and research process (Heidegger, 1962; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). It is acknowledged that the researcher may influence the subject under investigation (and vice versa) and that their role is highly significant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The interpretative element in IPA is not seen as an additional procedure (Heidegger, 1962). However, it is thought to reflect an inevitable and basic structure of our being in the world and the fact that we are embedded in language (Finlay, 2008; Heidegger, 1962).

Researcher subjectivity is deemed an inevitable and fundamental part of the research process in IPA (Finlay, 2008). Finlay coined the term ‘phenomenological attitude’ to capture the degree to which the researcher is open to the other and to viewing the world in a completely different way (Finlay, 2008). It is generally acknowledged in IPA that the analysis is a product of the interactions that unfold between the researcher and the participant (Smith, Larkin & Flowers, 2009). This view has led a number of writers to claim that the researcher must be aware of their beliefs, interests and assumptions and to have some idea as to how those could impact upon the research, from the very onset of the study (Colaizzi, 1973; Finlay & Malano-Fisher, 2008; Godamer, 1975; Woolgar, 1988).

In light of that, it was important for me to have some awareness of my own experiences and how those could impact on the process of the research. Specifically, it was important for me to be mindful of the fact that I have witnessed domestic violence in different contexts and that I have assumed that it can occur due to self defence, or various family pressures. This awareness was important as it could help me to avoid imposing those views onto participants’ accounts. I thought about the possibility that I might be drawn to certain aspects of the data due to my own experiences (Osborne & Coyle, 2003). I was also mindful that I did not want

to focus heavily on my own experiences. Consequently, I found it very helpful to keep a reflective journal throughout the course of the study so that I could note my thoughts and feelings on a regular basis. The use of a reflective journal is recommended by a number of researchers and has been highlighted as a useful tool in qualitative research (Golsworthy & Coyle, 2001).

The idea that one might ‘bracket’ their assumptions has largely been rejected in qualitative research (Halling, Leifer, Rowe, 2006). Although some researchers took the view that ‘bracketing’ their assumptions meant they could approach the data in a more open way (Giorgi, 2009; Stanley & Wise, 1993), others claim this is impossible (Halling, Leifer, Rowe, 2006). For instance, Heidegger (1962) was one of the first to claim that we are too much “beings in the world” to achieve this state and that we should, in fact, embrace our involvement in the research (Heidegger, 1962). As such, it has been argued that it is preferable for the researcher to remain aware of their assumptions rather than attempt to suspend their own beliefs or set aside their assumptions (Shutz, 1962). It is considered vital that the researcher finds ways to acknowledge the impact their assumptions will have on the process of engaging with the data and the participants’ words (Colaizzi, 1973; Goamer, 1975; Smith, 1996). It has even been argued that the researchers pre-existing beliefs could help them make more sense of the participants’ experiences (Colaizzi, 1973; Polit & Hungler, 1991; Smith, 1996, Willig, 2001). However, the capacity to work reflexively is a key part of qualitative research (Goamer, 1975; Yardley, 2000). In this study, it involved repeated and ongoing reflection between the participants’ narratives and my own assumptions in a bid to view their data in a new way (Goamer, 1975).

The interpretive activity in IPA and the analysis of the data is deemed a dynamic process (Smith, Larkin & Flowers, 2009). Furthermore, it employs a 'double hermeneutic' which encapsulates the process whereby the participant is interpreting their own life experiences while the researcher is interpreting this knowledge (Packer & Addison, 1989; Palmer, 1969; Rennie, 1990). This process highlights that understanding another person's experience is possible and that it allows the researcher to draw out meanings which otherwise might be difficult for the individual to convey (Denzin, 1995, Smith, 2003).

INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS IN FAVOUR OF OTHER QUALITATIVE METHODS.

IPA rests on the assumption that what the participant has to impart offers insights into their cognitive inner world and how they make sense of their experience (Smith, Larkin & Flowers, 2009; Todorova & Kotzeva, 2006). IPA is consistent with gaining a deep and rich understanding of the participant's life-world and the phenomenon that is under investigation. On the basis that I am interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the perceptions women hold of perpetrating domestic violence toward men, this method seemed the most relevant.

In contrast with other methods, IPA allows the researcher to gain an insider's view in order to illuminate how the participants' make sense of their experiences (Smith, 1996; Smith, Larkin & Flowers, 2009). I considered Grounded Theory (GA) for this study, although it is often deemed more useful for areas of sociological

research due to its emphasis on social processes (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss, 1987; Willig, 2003). The principal aim of this method is the development of theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Strauss & Corbin (1987) emphasised that the researcher must begin with an area of inquiry and allow whatever is theoretically relevant to emerge. They elaborated that the process involves the identification of categories and the subsequent development of a theoretical account of the general features of a topic (Strauss & Corbin, 1987). However, this account is always grounded in empirical observations and data (Martin & Turner, 1986).

Although there is general agreement that grounded theory employs interpretivist tools that are similar to IPA, there are concerns that it stems from positivism (Bryant, 2002). For instance, Bryant (2002) claims that the discovery of theory, which is central to GA, suggests a belief in an objective, realist perspective and the notion of one true reality (Locke, 2001). The focus on the generation of theory was the primary reason why I rejected this method for this research. In particular, I noted Bryant's (2002) claim that the focus on theory can alienate the recipients from the research findings. It has also been argued that the coding process in GT produces increasingly abstracted and de-contextualised data (Kushner & Morrow, 2003). Furthermore, there is an emphasis in IPA on depth of analysis among a small group of participants (Smith, 1996). However, grounded theory shows a tendency to draw on convergences within a much larger population in order to support wider conceptual explanations as a result (Cresswell, 1998; Willig, 2003).

With respect to other methods, the focus on cognitions and sense making in IPA differs from Discourse Analysis (DA) (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Smith, Harre, Van Langenhove, 1995; Smith, 2004). There is scepticism among DA researchers about the accessibility of cognitions (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Although DA has a focus on language, its primary goal is to explore that in terms of its function in constructing reality (Edwards & Potter, 1992). To a degree, DA regards verbal data as behaviour in itself (Potter & Weatherall, 1987). Therefore, unlike IPA, discourse analysis strives to examine the role and structure of language in describing a person's experience (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1997). In contrast, there is a focus in IPA on how individuals ascribe meaning to their personal experience as they interact with their social environments (Smith, Jarman & Osborne, 1999).

Before selecting IPA I also gave some consideration to the role of Thematic Analysis (TA). Several researchers have claimed that thematic coding is already an integral part of other major analytic traditions such as grounded theory (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). However, others argue that thematic analysis should be used as a technique in its own right (Roulston, 2001). Similarly to IPA, this widely used method is regarded as a flexible tool which can provide rich and detailed accounts of the research data (Roulston, 2001). In essence, this tool can be used to identify and report patterns (themes) within the data (Roulston, 2001). However, Boyatzis (1998) claims that thematic analysis can go further than this and that it can be used to interpret various aspects of the research topic. Unlike IPA, thematic analysis is not wed to any particular pre-existing theory (Tuckett, 2005). In addition, there remains a lot of uncertainty as to what TA actually is and how one should go about doing it (Tuckett, 2005). Attride-Stirling (2001) believes this is particularly

problematic because if we cannot be sure how an individual went about doing their analysis or what assumptions informed their analysis, then it is very difficult to evaluate the research. In general there is a consensus that IPA goes ‘a step beyond’ the workings of thematic analysis.

PARTICIPANTS

I aimed to recruit 6-8 women for this study. There is emphasis in IPA on gathering a purposive, homogenous sample (Smith, 1996). Adhering to this means that the phenomenon under investigation is relevant to all the participants involved in the study (Bramley & Eatough, 2005). Although it is generally agreed that there is no “right” sample size (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p.54; Smith & Eatough, 2006), numbers have ranged from one to fifteen participants in previous IPA research (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999). However, a number of writers have cautioned that smaller numbers are preferable (Smith, 2003; Smith & Eatough, 2006). They warn that too many can lead to superficial understandings and a loss of depth with a bigger sample (Smith & Eatough, 2006). It is claimed that data will become repetitive and eventually superfluous (Glaser & Straus, 1997). Existing IPA studies which have explored women’s violence toward men used samples that ranged from five to nine participants (Bowyer, Swanston & Vetere, 2014, Eatough, 2006; Hogan, Hegarty, Ward, & Dodd, 2011).

Eight women were recruited for this study. All of the participants in the research were over 18 years of age. The women were asked to self-identify as the perpetrator of domestic violence in their relationship. Furthermore, they were married/cohabiting and in heterosexual partner relationships. There are a few

studies that have explored the phenomenon of female perpetrated domestic violence in same sex and dating samples (Hamberger & Renzetti, 1996; Kimmel, 2002; Lie & Gentlewarrior, 1991). However, little research has been conducted among heterosexual married/cohabiting samples despite evidence which suggests that female perpetrated domestic violence can be a result of the high degree of frustration and stress that is involved in marriage and/or long term partner relationships (Fiebert & Gonzalez, 1997).

Women who had been convicted or incarcerated for perpetrating domestic violence toward men were not included in the study. The decision to exclude those women was based on the research which indicates that there are high levels of trauma and related mental health difficulties among incarcerated women (Liebman, Burnette, Raimondi, Nicols-Hadeed, Merle, Cerulli, 2014). Furthermore, Liebman et al (2014) note the challenges that can arise in trying to establish a rapport with participants while conducting qualitative research in a custodial setting.

As the qualitative method of data analysis rests on the use of language, all of the participants recruited for the study spoke fluent English. The participants were asked if they were currently engaging in therapy and five out of the eight women claimed they had accessed this support.

Participant recruitment

I anticipated that recruiting women for the study might prove difficult. I wondered if any women would feel able to come forward and speak about their experiences given the highly sensitive and personal nature of the topic. Consequently, I

contacted a vast number of charities across London that work directly or indirectly with women who have perpetrated domestic violence toward men. I sought advice from a leading charity in the field of domestic violence research called Respect and I spoke to them about who I should contact for recruitment purposes. The process of recruiting participants for this study spanned several months. The participants who came forward were recruited from the following services: Temper, Marriage Care, Relate, Cranstoun, Domestic Violence Support Service, Guild Support Services. To garner interest, I visited a number of those services on more than one occasion and spoke to the case workers about the criteria for the women that I hoped to recruit.

The recruitment procedure was facilitated by the following pieces of information: email correspondence that was sent to the various charities outlining the aims of the research (Appendix 2), a flyer that was distributed in a local newsletter and displayed at various charities (Appendix 3), an information sheet which was used to supply any interested participants with further details of the study (Appendix 4). For those participants who agreed to take part in the research, they were supplied with the following pieces of information: a consent form outlining their right to withdraw from the study at any time and issues pertaining to confidentiality (Appendix 5), a demographic questionnaire (Appendix 6), an interview schedule (Appendix 7) and a participant de-brief form (Appendix 8).

I contacted a number of individual case workers at the organisations listed in order to identify suitable participants for the research (based on the aforementioned inclusion/exclusion criteria). The participants were asked if they would be willing

to participate in the study on a voluntary basis by their case workers initially. If they agreed, I met with them subsequently to discuss the study and to offer them more information. This also gave me the opportunity to check for informed consent. The participants that were sourced through the charities were subject to risk of harm and vulnerability checks and I was provided with this information prior to the onset of the interviews.

Two of the participants that were included in the study responded to an advertisement that was put on display at two counselling services (Appendix 3). Those participants contacted me via telephone and were interviewed via skype. The advertisement was also placed in a local newsletter and circulated over a four week period however no participants were recruited via this method.

The responses that I received from the participants varied. Some of the women were very interested and relieved at having an opportunity to discuss their experiences. Three of the women were particularly reserved and hesitant at first, about coming forward. Those women also found it difficult to convey their experiences and put words to the violence that they had perpetrated. I found it curious that none of the women asked me what my reasons were for exploring this topic. Instead, I found that a number of the women were preoccupied with seeking 'answers' and unravelling their experiences in such a way where it might make more sense to them. I considered whether or not I would disclose to the women my reasons for conducting the study. I thought at length about the impact this could have on them and the process of the research. I decided that if I were to disclose this information, that I would do so once the interviews had finished.

Figure 1, presented below, outlines basic participant demographics and the details of the charities they were recruited from. This table can also be viewed in Appendix 1. All of the participants included in this study were given pseudonyms (*)

Fig. 1. A table featuring participant demographics.

*** All of the participants real names were replaced with pseudonyms**

Name *	Age	Marital Status	Recruited from...	Ethnicity	Number of dependants	Socioeconomic status
Emma	29	M	Guild support services	White British	0	Working class
Deborah	39	Co	Domestic Violence Support Service	White British	2	Working class
Louise	37	Co	Guild Support Services	White British	0	Working class
Melanie	38	M	Marriage Care	White British	1	Middle class
Carla	35	M	Relate	White British	1	Working class
Laura	41	M	Temper	Chinese/American	1	Working class
Susan	37	Co	Cranstoun	White British	0	Working class
Jennifer	42	M	Cranstoun	Asian British	2	Working class

A semi structured interview was used for data collection. I considered this method to be the most appropriate and preferable to more formal, structured interview tools as they enable the participant to share their experiences openly (Smith, Jarman, Osborne, 1999; Wimpenny & Gas, 2000). Semi structured interviews are consistent with IPA research (Smith, 1996). This type of interview allows the researcher to delve more deeply into areas of personal and social matters as opposed to group interviews, which restrict this (Bernard, 1988). Furthermore, they enable the researcher to make interventions and to ask participants to expand, clarify and say more about their comments (Arksey & Knight, 1999). As such they offer an opportunity for the researcher to gently probe and explore participants' descriptions during the interviews and it enables the researcher to have a greater degree of flexibility (Kvale, 1996). Kvale (1996, p.5) states that a semi structured interview is a "professional conversation whose purpose it is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomenon" (Kvale, 1996). The interviews were kept relatively informal, in the sense that I endeavoured to have a flowing conversation with the participants rather than question them rigidly.

This study is an exploration of women's accounts of their domestic violence toward men and their perception of that, including their understanding as to how those acts arose. As such, it was important to develop questions for the interview schedule that could be answered by the particular research methodology (Smith, Jarman, & Osborne, 1999). The following questions were included in an interview schedule (Appendix 7);

- 1 Thank you for coming forward to take part in this study, can you tell me why you came forward?
- 2 Can you tell me about a recent incident that took place between you and your partner
- 3 Can you tell me how you explain to yourself what happened between you and your partner?
- 4 Is there anything more you can tell me that would help me understand your experiences of domestic violence?

Open ended prompts were also used at various points throughout the interview where necessary (how did that make you feel, can you tell me more about that, what did that mean to you?). The prompts were used to gently encourage further exploration, reflection or clarification from the participants (Parahoo, 2006).

The inclusion of open-ended and carefully worded questions in semi structured interviews is recommended (Bernard, 1988). The first question was deemed useful for proceeding in a natural, relaxed and conversational way and for building a rapport with the participants (Berg, 1989). I avoided questions that were overly complex as this may have left the participants feeling puzzled and unable to answer the questions (Berg, 1989). Furthermore, I chose not to use questions that started with the word 'why' as Berg (1989) states this can sound challenging. Crucially, I considered that affectively worded questions can arouse strong emotional responses in participants that are often negative (Berg, 1989). I therefore aimed to keep the questions simple and worded sensitively. A pilot interview was conducted and this step is generally supported by a number of researchers (Green & Thorogood, 2004).

I found that conducting a pilot interview gave me an opportunity to see how the participants might respond to the questions.

Procedure

Six of the participants were interviewed in a private room on the premises of the charity organisation. This gave both of us some privacy and it enabled the interview to be conducted confidentially with few distractions. Prior to the onset of the interviews, I gave the participants the information sheet (appendix 4), a consent form (appendix 5) and a demographic questionnaire (appendix 6). The consent form outlined the aims and purpose of the study along with the participants' right to withdraw at any time. The consent form also highlighted the issue of confidentiality. The interviews did not commence unless the participants had consented to take part (and audio recorded) both verbally and in writing. Furthermore, I did not proceed with the interviews until the participants were feeling comfortable and unless they had clearly stated that they were ready to begin.

The process of gaining informed consent ensured that all of the participants were knowledgeable about the research (Strydom, 2002). In addition, it gave them an opportunity to ask any further questions or raise any queries or concerns (Strydom, 2002). The participants were informed of the potential risks and benefits of taking part in this research and this is a recommended approach in qualitative studies (Strydom, 2002). The participants interviewed via skype were sent a stamped addressed envelope which contained the information sheet (appendix 4), a consent form (appendix 5) and demographic questionnaire (appendix 6).

The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 1 hour 40 minutes. However, prior to the onset of the interviews the participants were informed that they could take up to two hours. They were informed that the interviews would be audio recorded and they were asked to consent to that. All of the participants who took part in the research were offered the chance to view their transcripts at a later date. I felt this was an important step as it gave the participants an opportunity to say if they would like something removed from their transcript. This process also helped to check for testimonial validity (Yardley, 2000). However, none of the participants took up the offer of viewing their transcript subsequent to the interview. Two participants were interviewed on two separate occasions due to their difficulty articulating their experiences. The process of gaining informed consent was followed prior to the start of the second interviews with those women.

The participants were informed as to how the data would be stored (i.e. securely for a period of ten years and then destroyed). When the interviews had finished, the participants were given a debrief form (appendix 8). This form contained several useful contact numbers that the participants could use if they required additional support or advice post interview (this also included a contact number for male victims). The same contact numbers were also included in the information sheet (Appendix 4), so that any participant who left the interview early would still have access to that information.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Full ethical approval was gained from the **University of Roehampton on 9th June 2014**, prior to starting the research (refer to Appendix 9). Throughout the entire

process I adhered to and consulted the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009). I aimed to adhere to an ethic of care throughout all aspects of this study (Plummer, 2001). I was particularly concerned that confidentiality and the protection of the participants' anonymity were maintained at all times. Another key focus was the minimisation of participant distress throughout the research. This was a highly important ethical consideration of mine bearing in mind the sensitive and personal nature of the topic that was under investigation.

I was acutely aware of the potential social and clinical vulnerability of the participants that were involved in this study. Therefore, the minimisation of their distress was paramount. Equally, I took into account the possible risk of harm to self and others (such as a participant's partner and/or dependants) as a result of the research. I was also keen to protect my own safety throughout the study, and I ensured that I considered this at all times.

The minimisation of participant distress was considered at numerous stages of the study. This issue was at the forefront of my mind when I developed the questions for the interview schedule (Appendix 7). Furthermore, I considered my approach to the interview process and the potential dynamics that could unfold. I was very aware of the literature which states that female perpetrators exhibit high levels of anxiety and attachment related difficulties and how this could impact on the process (Dutton, 1998; Carney & Buttell, 2005; Holtzworth-Munroe, Stuart, 1994; Sonkin & Dutton, 2003). In particular, I was keen to avoid any sense of power imbalance between myself and the participants, which could enhance their feelings of distress and vulnerability. Although it is doubtful whether a power imbalance can be

completely eradicated during qualitative research (Berg, 1989) I attempted to make it an informal process.

I attempted to make the process of interviewing as relaxed as possible. In recognising that I was an active part of the interview process, I was keen to discuss and explore any fears, questions or queries the participants had about taking part and disclosing their experiences (Alvesson, 2003). I also acknowledged that it was likely their accounts would be influenced by my presence in the interview room (Alvesson, 2003). I endeavoured to listen to the participants with openness and I thought about Colaizzi's (1998) warning that the researcher must realise the participant is more than a source of data, and to listen with the totality of her being and the entirety of her personality.

The process of interviewing raised other issues. During earlier interviews, I struggled with how much I should interact throughout the process. I found that there was a real tension, at times, between establishing my role as interviewer/clinician/researcher and therapist. Finding an appropriate balance between those roles was challenging. I felt quite anxious about the degree to which my non-research self should be present throughout the interview without interfering with the process or the data in any way (Glensne & Peshkin, 1992). I considered how any attempts to problem solve or look at the wider picture such as I might in therapy could complicate the process of the research. I wondered if those concerns had an impact on the way in which I engaged in the interview process at first. I found that writing in my reflective journal helped me to explore and think about my role, and that this started to help me find more confidence with the interview

process (Reinharz, 1992). Reflecting on my role in more depth enabled me to make subtle changes to my approach to interviewing where necessary. On a few occasions I found that some of the women began to stray off topic and that they started to share other unrelated subjects in a lot of detail. In those situations it was important for me to try and gently steer the interview back on course.

I considered that the interviews with the participants could bring up particular issues that would resonate with me. It was possible that I would be reminded of some of my own experiences. Furthermore, I also wondered if I would feel nervous or intimidated with some of the participants during interview. It occurred to me on two occasions that I felt quite anxious and it was important for me to acknowledge those feelings and where they probably stemmed from. Reflecting on the interviews subsequently and noting any observations, thoughts or feelings in my reflective journal, was a useful step. This helped me to move forward in a slightly different way with any subsequent interviews and prevented me from feeling overwhelmed. Examples/excerpts from my reflective journal can be viewed in Appendix 11.

Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all the participants who took part in the study prior to the onset of data collection. This process ensured that all the participants were aware of the aims and purpose of the study and, in particular, their right to withdraw at any time. Furthermore, informed consent gave me an opportunity to discuss with the participants the concept of boundaries and confidentiality. I

repeatedly checked consent with the participants' at different stages throughout the research. This is generally recommended and the participants were asked on at least two separate occasions about this (Yardley, 2000).

Risk of harm/Participant distress

As mentioned previously, the nature of this research and the topic under investigation is sensitive and there was a risk that some of the participants may have experienced distress. The risk of harm was also considered throughout the process of this research. It has been argued that harm can either be psychological or physical (Cowells, 1988). However, it is claimed that the risk of harm caused to participants as a consequence of qualitative research should be negligible (Cowells, 1988; Davis, 1990). Taking into account the topic under investigation, there was a risk that powerful emotions could emerge for a number of the women (Lee & Renzetti, 1990). Consequently, the participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. It was also deemed appropriate to remind the participants that they could take breaks during the interview if and when they needed to. On the occasions when I noticed that a participant seemed upset and distressed, I felt that it was very important to talk to them about what they were feeling at that moment. I also felt that it was very important to offer each participant some time to stop and reflect for a while if they needed to. In order to minimise the potential for participant distress, I thought at length about my approach to the interviews as well.

At the beginning and at the end of each interview, the participants were thanked for their time and willingness to take part in the study. I aimed to provide the participants with a safe environment and empathic conditions (Cowells, 1988). Furthermore, my interventions throughout the interviews were gentle and I aimed to avoid making comments that could sound challenging or judgemental. I even considered that my tone of voice was important and my body language worth thinking about. I felt it was important to take my time throughout the interviews and I did not want the participants to feel hurried or under any pressure. I recognised that the women might find the topic hard to talk about, so the pace and length of the interviews was important to consider. Two of the women found it very difficult to convey their experiences to me so they were offered a second opportunity for interview, which they accepted. The time and space for reflection between the interviews seemed to help the women and they were able to talk more openly on the second occasion. In the event that any of the women became aggressive toward me I was prepared to terminate the interview and seek assistance from a member of staff on the premises, however, this did not occur. This may have been followed by contacting the relevant authorities if I had concerns about their safety or the well-being of their partners post interview.

After the interviews, a participant de-brief took place. This gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their interview and to ask me further questions. I also found that it was particularly useful to engage in conversation with the participants about what I considered to be other 'safe' topics before they left. Furthermore, I checked that the participants were aware of who to contact if they experienced distress in the aftermath of the interview process. This involved going through the

list of contact numbers with them as outlined in the de-brief form. I checked that they had understood and that they were clear who to contact (Appendix 8).

In the event that any of the participants disclosed their intention to harm themselves, the appropriate authorities would be contacted. In addition, if any of the participants mentioned that they intended to harm their partners or other people, this same course of action would be followed. In the first instance, I planned to contact the relevant case worker at the charities and share my concerns with them. However, in case staff members were unavailable, and for those participants who were interviewed via skype, I planned to contact the local Community Safety Unit (and MARAC team, which deals with cases of domestic violence) and Police staff.

In light of the nature of domestic violence, I was concerned about the potential repercussions for the partners or any dependants that were present in the women's homes, as a result of their participation in the research. I was mindful that any agitation or frustration as a result of their interviews, could impact on a partner or child. If such concerns arose, I was prepared to follow the aforementioned course of action, and contact the relevant authorities. In the event that any concerns arose in relation to the wellbeing of any children, I planned to contact the emergency Duty and Assessment worker at the local Children's Social Care team in the participant's borough of residence. However, this did not occur. As an additional way of safeguarding, I included the contact number of an organisation that works with and supports male victims of domestic violence, in the participant information sheet (Appendix 4) and de-brief form (Appendix 8). I hoped that the male victims would access and make use of this number if they needed to.

The participants were invited to have further contact with me after the interviews if they had concerns. This offer was extended to them so that they could access and view their transcripts if they wanted to. I felt that the offer of additional support and contact post interview, might help the women to feel supported, considered and held throughout the entire process.

Confidentiality and anonymity

To protect participant confidentiality attention was paid to concealing their identity at all stages of the research. For instance, codes were assigned to the participants in the initial stages and those were replaced with pseudonyms for the final stages of the analysis. Pseudonyms were also given to any third parties referred to by the participants. In addition, the participant consent forms and data were kept securely and separately to ensure confidentiality was not breached.

Interviewing

I thought about my own safety during the process of this research. I took steps to protect myself and I selected a seat closest to the exit in the interview rooms. I also made sure that a member of staff was present when I conducted the interviews on site at the charities. Semi structured interviews were employed for this research. This type of interview has been described as a shared experience in which the researcher and the participant come together to create a context of conversational intimacy in which the participant feels comfortable telling their story (Ramos, 1998). This method was deemed the most appropriate on the basis that they help to

foster trust, which, in turn, can establish and facilitate the process of enquiry. However, I reflected on the fact that it is also this element of trust which can occasionally lead participants to disclose something that they later seem to regret (Larossa, Bennett, Gelles, 1981). I was mindful that this combination of trust and conversational style can have numerous benefits yet it also has some risks. I attempted to keep in mind however the notion of participant agency, and the element of control that they all had through their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The participants were reminded of this at various stages.

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was achieved through the use of semi-structured interviews based on an interview schedule (Appendix 7). However, the following materials were also used;

- A) A demographic questionnaire to collect data concerning age, ethnicity, employment, address and length of time in current relationship. The form enquired whether the participants were currently in therapy (Appendix 6).
- B) A Dictaphone to audio record the participants
- C) An information sheet (Appendix 4)
- D) A debrief form which was handed to the participants post interview (Appendix 8).

DATA ANALYSIS

I found the process of data analysis lengthy, time-consuming and on occasions somewhat painstaking. The first step involved transforming the audio-recordings into text. In order to do this, I transcribed each recording in turn manually and this

was a time consuming and labour intensive process. However, this process enabled me to immerse myself in the data and it gave me an opportunity to become much more familiar with the participants' accounts. The process of data analysis followed the four step phase that is recommended by Smith & Osborn (2003).

To begin with, data analysis followed a rather cyclical and labour intensive process in which I read and re-read the transcripts over and over several times. Although time consuming, this process helped me to immerse myself more in the data and I began to feel increasingly familiar with the participants' narratives (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999). In conjunction with each reading, I began to make notes including key phrases, observations, preliminary interpretations and connections in the left hand margin of the page. I also paid attention to the areas of the transcripts that were particularly descriptive or emotive in content and I highlighted those in different colours. I also found it helpful to ask myself questions as I went about reading the transcripts such as; what else is this person trying to say? I paid close attention to the participants' language including nuances or areas that seemed particularly vague in their accounts. I also highlighted sounds and noises that were made by the participants as they spoke and any long pauses. Furthermore, I focused on parts of the transcripts where the participants talked about how they understood their violence, what they perceived as contributing factors and their feelings in relation to the experience. The process of data analysis proved to be particularly challenging at first. For instance, I became aware of a tension between staying close to the participants' words and my tendency to try and be a "good therapist". For instance, I was very aware that I was often trying to understand or interpret the bigger picture. This meant that I often had to draw myself back and try and focus

and stay close to the participants' accounts. An example of my workings can be viewed in Appendix 10 which shows an extract from a transcript.

I also found that the process of data analysis was sometimes quite an emotional experience. I noticed that I experienced an array of different emotions as I read through the women's transcripts repeatedly and that those feelings were sometimes difficult to shake off. On occasions, I was aware that I felt sad after reading some of the transcripts while at other times I felt quite anxious or a little unnerved by the content. I also found myself feeling quite angry and quite fearful at times. A number of the participants gave very rich descriptions of the circumstances around their violence and the dynamics between them and their partner, some of which made for quite chilling reading. My reflective journal proved invaluable throughout this process and it helped me to avoid becoming overwhelmed by some of the content. It was useful to make notes and add reflections to the journal consistently as I moved from one transcript to the next. The use of reflective journals in qualitative research is believed to facilitate reflexivity (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001). Journals provide the researcher with an opportunity to examine "personal assumptions and goals" and to clarify "individual belief systems and subjectivities" (Ahern as cited in Russell & Kelly, 2002, p. 2). I certainly found this to be the case, and my reflective journal was useful throughout all stages of the research.

As I continued to view the transcripts, I moved to the next stage of the analysis and emergent themes were noted in the right-hand margin. For each transcript, the emergent themes that I identified were listed on a separate sheet of paper and I

viewed those in order to see if there were any connections or contradictions between them. Following that, I began to try and cluster some of the emergent themes together and I grouped those in order to form a superordinate theme. I then gave the clusters a descriptive label and this label aimed to convey the conceptual nature of the themes therein.

The next stage involved producing a table of master themes for each transcript. I also compared the master themes that I had for one transcript to the master themes produced from other transcripts. I did this in order to see if there were any connections between them. As a result of this process, I eventually arrived at a final set of superordinate themes. Finally, I attempted to order the themes so that they produced a coherent, narrative account of the participants' experiences. A table of the final set of master and sub themes can be viewed in Appendix 12.

I found the process of giving titles to master and sub themes quite challenging. I became aware that I had a tendency to develop titles that made the phenomenon sound more palatable or pleasant in some way. It occurred to me that I was at risk of losing the raw, messy, unpleasantness of the experience of perpetrating violence as the women had described it. I therefore spent some time re-working the titles so that they captured the phenomenological experience as described in the women's accounts more closely.

REFLECTIVE COMPONENT AND RESEARCHER REFLEXIVITY

It is widely acknowledged that an important element of qualitative research is the role of the researcher. Specifically, it is important that the researcher is aware of what they bring to the study in terms of their beliefs, experiences and assumptions with respect to the topic that is under investigation and that they are aware of researcher reflexivity (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). The term 'reflexivity' is generally thought to involve understanding the role of the researcher as well as the research process and how those can shape the findings (Willig, 2001). Finlay (2003) developed a type of reflexivity, which she named 'hermeneutic reflection'. Hermeneutic reflection encapsulates the idea that we cannot keep ourselves out of the research (Finlay, 2003). Instead, Finlay (2003) argued that our findings are based around our biases and preconceptions and she states that because those form our internal world, that we cannot understand experiences without them. However, Finlay emphasised the importance of bearing in mind our "forestructures" and to reflect upon our interpretation of our own experiences and the phenomenon that is under investigation (Finlay, 2003). In essence, she advised that we must not stick blindly to our own fore-meanings about the phenomenon that is under investigation, if we want to understand the meaning of another person (Finlay, 2003).

To this end, as a married, white female from a working class background, engaging in interviews with female perpetrators of domestic violence, I thought at length about what I brought to the research process. I have already mentioned my experiences of witnessing domestic violence and my assumption that it can be connected with a variety of family pressures and self defence. Furthermore, from

the onset of the study and after some reflection, I became aware that I seemed to lean toward the feminist perspective of women's violence. For instance, I believe that it can occur in response to being controlled, as opposed to seeking control, over men. I considered that this view of women's violence might stem from the fact that I tend to view myself as a feminine, somewhat passive woman in intimate partner relationships who has not sought to control or dominate a male partner. However, this view could also be linked with childhood experiences and my tendency to adopt a kind of peacemaker role.

Prior to engaging in interviews with the women, I wondered if a number of the participants would talk about their feelings of shame. I considered whether I anticipated that they would talk about their feelings of shame due to my own experiences of having heated verbal exchanges in intimate partner relationships and how those have left me feeling. I thought about my own tendency to feel guilt, shame and to replay the situation in my mind repeatedly after the event. I wondered if the tendency to question myself and the instinct to internalise the difficulty, might also be experienced by these women.

It seemed likely that, due to my own difficulty accepting my anger and capacity to be aggressive that I assumed women who have been violent might also feel this way. I was rather surprised therefore, when one of the women spoke at length about feeling justified in her actions toward her partner and that her narrative contained little in terms of any feelings of shame. During interviews, I found myself feeling curious about the women's lack of curiosity regarding my reasons for doing the research. I wondered how the women perceived me, and if they assumed I had

perpetrated domestic violence toward a partner or not. A number of the women's narratives revealed that they perceived their actions as well as themselves as *not normal* and there was a feeling that they were alienated from the rest of the population. I wondered if this had some connection with their lack of curiosity regarding my involvement in the research, and this seemed to highlight the intensely isolating nature of their experiences. Anger and aggression in women is often deemed a consequence of "hormonal" difficulties and the "unbalanced" woman. On reflection, I realised that I have also taken this view at face value at times. Not only did I grow up in an environment where this explanation was often used, there have been times when I have relied on this to explain my own anger and aggression. I am aware that I have heard both men and women make reference to an angry woman as a "hormonal" woman. Perhaps for some, this is the easiest way to interpret a woman's anger; by tying it to her biology. I was therefore struck by the absence of this particular explanation in the women's narratives although one of the participants mentioned that she thought her violence was connected with her fluctuating "hormones" around menstruation.

I considered what I brought to the interviews, consciously and unconsciously, and if there was something about me that said to the women that they should not ask me what my reasons were for selecting this topic. I wondered what the impact on the participants and the interviews might have been, if I were someone who could disclose an experience of perpetrating domestic violence toward a male partner. I wondered if the participants might have felt safer or if they would have felt free to disclose aspects of their experience which they otherwise tried to conceal. This highlights something about the taboo nature of the topic and the fact that it is

generally not talked about. However, a number of the participants expressed their appreciation at having an opportunity to talk rather candidly about their experiences, and this surprised me. Some of the women were motivated to take part in the research as they wanted to know that they were not *alone* and that other women shared similar experiences to them. One woman expressed her desire to help other women as a result of taking part in the research. Furthermore, she said she hoped that as a result of taking part in the study that this topic could be talked about more freely in future.

As part of the process of the research, I have acknowledged the fact that I have experienced difficulty coming to terms with and accepting my own capacity to be angry and aggressive. There have been times when I have considered my own anger and verbal aggression as something which does not seem to ‘fit’ with my idea of femininity. I considered the possibility that I have internalised statements and messages from my childhood, which conveyed that girls should not behave aggressively. This has resulted, at times, in a struggle with my sense of self and some unease around feelings of anger. I assumed that some of the women might share these difficulties and struggle to accept their angry, aggressive and violent feelings. It was important for me to be aware of those preconceptions prior to starting the study.

Finally, I felt it was important to try and position myself as non-expert throughout this research. I hoped that this would allow the participants to be placed at the very centre of things. I was aware that I wanted the interviews to be a collaborative endeavour, which focused primarily on the participants’ experiences. I thought at

length about my three, different roles (researcher, counselling psychologist trainee, and my experiences concerning domestic violence) and how they could potentially impact or interfere with the research. The contribution of those roles was thought about continuously throughout the research. There were times when I experienced some conflict between those different positions. However, I attempted to manage that through discussions with my supervisors, peers, as well as ongoing personal reflection in my journal. In particular, I was mindful that the interview should not become a counselling session however at times this was difficult to avoid. Consequently, I tried to keep my input throughout the interviews to a minimum and I focused on offering reflections and prompts to the participants instead. I felt that it was important to acknowledge the participants when it was clear to me that they were feeling distressed and/or struggling to communicate. At those points, I tried to acknowledge their distress and the difficulty they had in talking about the highly sensitive topic. I was aware that I felt very empathic toward the women in their struggle to convey their experiences.

CHAPTER THREE

FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The data analysis revealed a number of interrelated themes that illuminate women's perceptions of perpetrating domestic violence toward a male partner. Three master themes will be presented in this chapter. Those themes include "*Violence in the wake of multiple triggers*", "*The all encompassing emotional experience*", and "*Violence as the unrecognisable intruder*". Those themes and the sub-themes therein are presented in a table in Figure 2. The themes presented here are an outcome of the collaborative endeavour that is characteristic of qualitative research. This means that the findings will reflect the participant's thoughts as well as my own interpretations throughout the study.

Figure. 2. This table presents three master themes and sub-themes

As mentioned previously, the participants in this study were given pseudonyms and they are referred to as Melanie, Emma, Louise, Susan, Jennifer, Carla & Laura.

<p>Master Theme 1 – Violence in the wake of multiple triggers</p> <p>Sub Themes – The desire to be heard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Reacting to a sense of injustice, betrayal and disrespect- The desire for retribution- The fight for survival
<p>Master Theme 2 – The all encompassing emotional experience</p> <p>Sub Themes – Frustration and anger</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Shame and worthlessness
<p>Master Theme 3 – Violence as the unrecognisable intruder</p> <p>Sub Themes – Possessed by an alien other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The struggle to fathom and bear the reality of one's aggressiveness

VIOLENCE IN THE WAKE OF MULTIPLE TRIGGERS

A number of the women saw their violence as being *set off* (Melanie, 94) by very specific triggers. They perceived themselves as being repeatedly prodded and *pushed* (Louise, 7 Jennifer, 103 Melanie, 242) by a partner's behaviour and they perceived this as leading to an explosive reaction that was felt to be as sudden and spontaneous as the flick of a *switch* (Laura, 31). The triggers identified by the participants were varied and included their sense that they were unheard, betrayed, disrespected, unfairly treated, lied to and seriously undermined and intimidated. Their accounts were peppered with references to their partners as present and central to the context in which their violence subsequently arose. This gave a sense of the dynamic process which was at play and characterises domestic violence. Propelled into violence, their actions ranged from swearing, throwing objects, and spitting to physical and sadistic contact behaviours such as slapping, punching, kicking and biting.

THE DESIRE TO BE HEARD

The women talked in depth about how they perceived themselves as eclipsed, *shut out* (Emma, 120) and barricaded into silence by their partners, and this intensified their battle to convey themselves to them. For all of the women, their narratives revealed the growing frustration and anger at not being listened to or acknowledged by their partner. Despite their best efforts to articulate themselves in a thoughtful way, there was an overriding sense that their feelings were in some way being ignored. This experience reinforced to them their feeling that they were invisible, unimportant and unvalued by their partner, which cultivated their belief that they

were worthless and their perception of their partner as deliberately antagonistic. The irritation and frustration at being *shut out* (Emma, 120) during an argument with her partner over his use of pornography was expressed by Emma when she stated:

I feel shut out by him, yeah, yeah, and he, it is like he won't understand not like he can't understand but he won't understand because he is not listening and I, I don't know, I, I like to be understood (Emma, 120-122).

Emma perceived her partner as deliberately obstructive and that he was purposely shutting her out. This seemed to intensify her feelings of anger but it also appeared to fuel her determination to be acknowledged by him. Emma's narrative revealed her belief that her partner *deliberately tries to rile* (34) her through ignoring her attempts to express her feelings and voice her hurt over his use of pornography. Emma described his use of pornography as *horrible* (59). There was a feeling that she was redundant in her relationship due to her partner's frequent use of pornographic material. Emma described her sense that she was unimportant and her feeling that she was being pushed out and sidelined in the relationship. This was revealed in her narrative when she stated:

to feel that I am second, third, fourth best to all these millions of women it is just horrible (Emma, 66-67).

Emma's narrative revealed her belief that her partner did not *appreciate* (78) her and that he could not empathise with her feelings. Her account highlighted her belief that he did not *care enough* (113) about her to listen and to hear how his use of pornography had affected her. Emma described feeling as though she was dismissed by her partner, which seemed to stoke her anger. There was a fury at

being ignored, a strong sense of feeling silenced and a belief that she was *not good enough* (139) for him as a consequence.

For a number of the women their narratives revealed that there was something about the futility of words for those who felt they were rarely heard by their partners. Thus their attempts to challenge, explain or deliberately hurt their partners in a verbal way were often deemed completely ineffectual. This included verbally abusive behaviours such as swearing and criticism. For instance, Deborah revealed her attempts to tell her partner how his critical comments and insults about her weight had affected her:

becau- words don't say anything to him words do not mean nothing so the only thing I could get him back (Deborah, 63-65).

In this quote Deborah alludes to her sense that her words are empty and hollow. Deborah's narrative revealed her sense that words could not transmit, effectively her internal experience and that they almost seem to reverberate off her partner. Deborah's account highlighted her belief that her partner did not care about her or how he had hurt her feelings. Deborah described her sense that her verbal efforts were often obstructed, derailed or met with some other undesirable response from her partner. For a number of the women this was seen as connected with (and perpetuated) their subsequent use of violence toward their partners. It seemed that violence became the 'fall-back' mode of expression for their feelings where words failed the women.

he doesn't talk so for him to or for me to make him understand or before I can make him understand I'm just like lashing out becau- that is my way of you know of letting him know how I feel (Deborah, 27-29).

Deborah expressed her frustration and her perception that she had not been understood by her partner when she tried to explain to him how his hurtful comments about her weight had affected her. Deborah described how her partner had told her she was *fat* repeatedly. She perceived her physical violence as the only way in which she could convey her hurt and anger to her partner as she felt he would not listen. There is a sense that her violence is a way of delivering a message to her partner. It would seem that her violence conveys something to her partner which cannot be spoken or articulated in such a way where she feels it is acknowledged by him.

you know I say something and he is not on the same wavelength you know, he's just not getting what I am getting at and it is so frustrating it gets to a whole new level (Laura, 70-72).

Laura talked about the arguments she had with her partner over their different views and approaches to parenting. Laura's narrative revealed her sense that the lines of communication are not even crossed with her partner. For Laura, her partner is felt to be unreachable and her words ineffective. There was a feeling in Laura's narrative that her point of view was not acknowledged by her partner and an irritation that he could not seem to understand her. This block to effective communication or mutual understanding of some sort is *frustrating* for Laura and she perceived this as connected with her subsequent use of aggression. This was revealed in Laura's narrative when she hinted that "*it*" takes on a whole new level.

Laura seemed to be implying something with her use of the word "*it*". A number of the women referred to what could be their anger, aggression, or violence as "*it*".

This could indicate that there is something unnameable about their experiences and that it is difficult to put words to their anger and violence. It seemed as though it was difficult for some of the women to name their violence or articulate what their experiences had been. Their use of language in this way could be an attempt by some of the women to distance themselves from their violent, aggressive acts. Perhaps their use of the word “*it*” illuminated their feeling that there is something confusing or difficult to comprehend about their violent experiences.

A number of the women’s narratives revealed a mix of powerlessness and frustration underpinning their experiences of not being heard. Those feelings seemed to exacerbate participants’ distress. That appeared to foster feelings of anger which a number of the women saw as culminating in the resultant explosion of violence toward their partners.

REACTING TO A SENSE OF INJUSTICE, BETRAYAL AND DISRESPECT

A number of the participants talked about a *boiling* (Melanie, 260) and *enraging* (Jennifer, 123) sense of injustice and unfairness that launched them into violence. The women talked about their feelings of injustice and unfairness in relation to a partner’s use of pornography, the discovery of extramarital affairs, sexually explicit messages on a mobile phone, flirtatious behaviour with women, a sense of betrayal in connection with a partner’s addiction, and an array of verbal insults directed at them from a partner. This anger appeared to be connected to what they perceived as a lack of care shown to them by a partner. Many spoke about being the recipient of insensitive, uncaring behaviour, which left them feeling deeply humiliated. For

instance, Melanie described an alcohol fuelled incident in which she punched her partner after he mocked her physical appearance in front of friends:

how dare you say that to me how can you be so cruel (Melanie, 101-102).

The analysis revealed strong feelings of being offended and insulted by their partners. A number of the women described situations in which they experienced betrayal, disrespect and deceit and other behaviours that were viewed by them as shocking and bewildering. This was related to incidents in which they discovered a sexual betrayal, infidelity and lies concerning other women. For Jennifer, her feelings of betrayal were connected with her partner's behaviour toward other women and his difficulties overcoming his addiction to alcohol which she believed he tried to conceal. Although a number of the women were in one sense floored by the unfairness of the situations they were in, the women perceived their feelings of powerlessness and betrayal as connected with their aggression and the belief that their violence was legitimate. In relation to trauma theory, it is interesting to note that intense feelings of betrayal and hopelessness often follow a person's exposure to a traumatic event (Hughes & Rasmussen, 2010). Betrayal trauma theory proposes that trauma perpetrated by someone whom the victim trusts or on whom the victim depends can have more psychologically damaging consequences than trauma perpetrated by someone with whom the victim is not so close (DePrince, Freyd & Malle, 2007; DePrince, Weinzierl & Combs, 2008).

Louise described an argument that she had with her partner in their flat when he returned home with lipstick on his face. Louise's account revealed her belief that

her partner was having an affair. Louise's account illuminated that she saw herself as trying to consistently please her partner in their relationship. This was revealed when she stated:

I feel like, almost like a kind of little, kind of, I'm, I'm there li- at his beck and call in his house but he goes off and does what he wants (Louise, 174-175).

Her perception that she was constantly striving to meet his needs above her own seemed connected with her irritation and the sense of injustice she felt when he came home with lipstick on his face. Her narrative revealed her sense that she was under threat from her partner when he responded to her attempts to confront him with verbal insults. Louise perceived her feelings of injustice and her feelings of fear as connected with her use of aggression:

It was almost, kind of, you know, I, I don't know whether to call it a righteous act, it was, it was a reaction to a complete and utter injustice what felt like complete, an- utter injustice (Louise, 368-370).

Referring to her violence as a *righteous act*, Louise's narrative reveals a strong feeling of justification. The term "righteous" almost implies a feeling that her actions were natural and correct.

Jennifer described her difficulty tolerating her partner's deceit and *lies*. Jennifer's narrative revealed strong feelings of deceit and betrayal that were connected with the discovery of her partner's *secret* mobile phone which contained sexually explicit messages to other women: *and I hate the lies, it just triggers* (Jennifer, 83-84).

Jennifer's narrative revealed that she perceived the *lies* and deceit as a *trigger* to her aggression:

he pushed me he has pushed and pushed and pushed me erm mentally and pushed and pushed and pushed me and lied and lied and squirmed and about stuff which I know is not true and just err that is what has lead to it (Jennifer, 75-77)

Jennifer's account illuminated a feeling that she had been *pushed* repeatedly by her partner. Jennifer connected this feeling with her perception that her partner was unwilling to tell her the truth. Jennifer used physical words i.e. *pushed* to convey her experience, which highlighted her feeling that she was being provoked in some way by her partner. Her account revealed that this provocation from her partner was not physical yet the effect that it had on Jennifer was one where she felt she had been *pushed* nonetheless. Jennifer's narrative highlighted that she felt her partner's actions were to some degree an assault on her *mentally*. This illuminated that Jennifer experienced her partner's behaviour and the lies regarding other women as having a similar affect on her to that of a physical assault. There is a feeling that she is being tested by her partner and *pushed* beyond some limit to the point of exasperation. Jennifer perceived this feeling of being *pushed* as connected with her physical acts of violence toward her partner and she alluded that this feeling of being *pushed* had *lead to it*. For a number of the women there was a feeling that deceit gave rise to a deep sense of *betrayal* (Emma, 21, Jennifer, 133) that overturned the stability and trust in the women's relationships and fostered their angry feelings.

I think it was just that, that frustration of feeling betrayed, of being not listened to, not understood and there is no other way of letting him know (Emma, 182-184).

For Emma, she perceived her violence as connected with a myriad of emotions that she experienced in response to betrayal and a feeling that she was being shut out. Emma's narrative revealed her struggle to comprehend and tolerate her partner's use of pornography, which she saw as a *massive betrayal* (Emma, 56). Her account revealed strong feelings of sexual betrayal and jealousy when she found pornographic material on his computer. Emma's narrative revealed her belief that her partner might *prefer* (Emma, 76) the women in the pornographic videos and she described her feeling that she was invisible to her partner. Such is the depth of her pain that she believed there was *no other way* of conveying to her partner the impact and emotional turmoil she was experiencing. Emma's belief that there is *no other way* reveals there is an element of justification behind her violence as she believes that there are *no other* tools she can employ in her particular situation.

In a number of the women's narratives there was a feeling that they were disorientated by the lies and they gave a sense of the immense effort that was involved in their search for the truth. A number of the women felt undermined by their partners' actions. This seemed to evoke feelings of frustration, anger and disillusionment in their relationships. In relation to discovering her partner's secret mobile phone and her feelings of betrayal Jennifer stated:

it's disrespect for everything that I have done and its betrayal and the lies (Jennifer, 133).

As a mother and a wife, Jennifer perceived herself as supportive toward her partner and his attempts to overcome his addiction to alcohol. There was a real sense in Jennifer's narrative that she felt humiliated by her partner as well as taken for

granted and not valued. Jennifer's account revealed her belief that she was not appreciated by her partner.

Carla perceived her violence as borne out of her feelings of injustice when she discovered a string of sexually explicit emails to another woman on her partner's computer. However, she also alluded to the double-bind and increased sense of unfairness that she felt when her violence became the focus and her actions the site of blame:

somehow I am in the wrong even though it is me who has actually been done a really awful disservice (Carla, 57-58).

Carla's quote highlights her feeling that her violence had somehow eclipsed the injustice which she felt triggered it. She described her belief that her partner would not account for his actions yet her violence became the *problem*. This propelled Carla into an even deeper sense of *frustration* and anger. This suggests that if her violence had been used instrumentally as a way to effect punishment, it had not worked for Carla. This seemed to inflame her irritation and sense of injustice.

THE DESIRE FOR RETRIBUTION

Linked with the aforementioned, several women described feeling a desire for retribution due to feeling they had been dealt a huge and unforgivable *disservice* (Carla, 58). Reeling from the sting of the unjust and unacceptable behaviours that were executed by their partners, the women described an almost overwhelming urge to settle the score. This was related to their discovery of a partner's infidelity, flirtatious texts and emails to other women. Furthermore, the women related their

desire for retribution to the cruel and hurtful insults and accusations they received from a partner. Although the majority of women were taken aback and abhorred by the violence which followed their urge to *get him back* (Deborah, 64-65), which in Deborah's case was in response to a slew of insults from her partner about her weight and his perception that she was an *unfit mother*, paradoxically it was perceived as a way of effecting a just punishment for the pain and torment that was caused to them. With a torrid and fierce need to redress the balance, there was a feeling that for some of the women, violence was their avenue for *revenge* (Emma, 316).

what he has done is so wrong and he, and I need to teach him a lesson, I sound like a wife beater saying that (Carla, 467-468).

Carla described her need to *teach him a lesson* after she discovered a string of flirtatious emails and texts that her partner had sent to other women. Her narrative revealed her intention and strong desire to address what she perceived as her partner's infidelity. Carla draws an interesting parallel between her intention to punish her partner and the masculine notion of "wife beater". This could indicate her wish to distance herself from that camp and position her violence as different. It could also highlight her belief that violence is a masculine entity and suggests an internalisation of the norms and stereotypes, which emphasis aggression as a male activity.

Perhaps influenced by or connected with the futility of words, participants described how in order to *get him back* (Deborah, 65), their actions were often physical. Deborah described how she threw a bowl at her partner and slapped him,

which she connected with her desire to *get him back*, after her partner called her *fat* and *disgusting*. It seemed that some of the participants were mobilised to convey something to their partners in a physical sense, which could not be expressed adequately, in words.

then I want him to feel as much pain as he has caused me and the only way to do that is physically because he won't listen (Emma, 125-126).

Recounting one of the times when she found pornographic material on her partner's computer, Emma alludes to the emotional *pain* that she experienced. A number of the women's narratives revealed their desire for their partner to experience the same degree of emotional hurt that they felt had been caused to them. This highlighted some intention to redress the balance and get *pay back*.

Their frustration at the futility of words was superseded by feelings of anger and their desire to exact punishment. Melanie described her inability to convey her feelings to her partner verbally, which she felt was overtaken by her intense desire for revenge. Melanie's narrative revealed her feelings of anger and hurt in response to her partner's verbal insults: *no, I can't do that, I just want to punish him* (Melanie, 225).

A number of the women's narratives revealed that their use of violence carried hope of redress, and intention of settling the score. The desire for redress was powerful and for many their accounts highlighted that they found this particularly hard to override or control:

maybe it is just me but I want him to hurt as much as he has hurt me and I just can't stop (Emma, 187-188).

Emma's admission that she *just can't stop* highlights the strength of her aggressive desire and suggests that she perceives her need to punish her partner with violence as something which she cannot control.

THE FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL

As tensions reached their peak in the context of their intimate relationships, some of the women found themselves confronted with the fear of being destroyed in a war situation. A number of the women's narratives revealed their belief that they were under threat and their accounts highlighted their feelings of fear. Their narratives illuminated that there was a sense of some impending danger and this seemed to rock their sense of personal safety. In this sub-theme, partners are viewed as menacing and *intimidating* (Louise, 192), reinforcing a belief that the insidious undercurrent of danger was about to break through. The women's accounts were detailed and descriptive and demonstrated the sense of threat they felt in the heated exchanges with their partners. Some of the women described a feeling that they were being *torn down* and *exposed*, during heated verbal exchanges with their partner. For some of the women, these interactions and exchanges evoked feelings of fear and terror, which intensified their feelings of vulnerability and they connected this with their need to defend and protect themselves with physical violence. Louise, Deborah & Jennifer described their uncertainty as to what was lurking around the corner and their palpable sense of fear and anxiety. This contributed to their belief that their physical and psychological well-being was in peril, and at risk of annihilation. Louise described

the frightening moment when she confronted her partner about what she perceived as his flirtatious behaviour with other woman:

really fearful that it, it, it like a threat, it was a threat of destr- a threat of being destroyed as a person (?) the only way I can describe it and that is what it looked like in his face as well, it looked like he had destruction in his eyes (Louise, 265-269)

Louise's narrative revealed her belief that she was in danger and that she was at risk of being destroyed. Her account highlights that she experienced a threat of annihilation which she found terrifying and she found herself in the frightening position as the one who could be *destroyed*. Louise commented that she feared she could be destroyed as *a person*, which might allude to her feeling that she was at risk of psychological and physical annihilation. What Louise describes here could be deemed a traumatic event, as the DSM-IV defines a traumatic event as one that 'involves actual or threatened death, serious injury or a threat to physical integrity' (Kessler, 2000; Rothschild, 2000). Such events are said to give rise to intense feelings of fear, horror or helplessness (Kessler, 2000), and Louise's narrative revealed that she experienced feelings of fear and a belief that she could be *destroyed* both psychologically and physically during the confrontation she had with her partner. Kessler (2000) notes that exposure to a life threatening trauma is a significant risk factor for the development of posttraumatic stress disorder and depression subsequently. A key factor which can influence the development of posttraumatic stress disorder after a traumatic event is the victim's appraisal of the traumatic incident and the degree to which they perceived themselves as under threat (Hughes & Rasmussen, 2010). Louise's narrative revealed her belief that she was about to be *destroyed* and her fear that she could be *overpowered* as a person, which indicates that she believed she was significantly under threat.

Louise's account revealed her sense that she had no verbal defence mechanism and she described her feeling that her partner *verbally pulls me down* (Louise, 179) and that he was *absolutely stripping me down verbally* (Louise, 251-252). This *stripping down* seemed connected with her feeling that her confidence and sense of self was being eroded and *chipped away* and there was a feeling of being exposed and humiliated. Louise's narrative revealed that she experienced this verbal *stripping down* (Louise, 200) as an attack on her emotionally and she described her feeling that her partner *destroyed everything* she said (Louise, 208). In her account, Louise described her partner's physical appearance as having something violent about it and her narrative revealed her perception that he had *destruction in his eyes*. Louise connected this with a greater feeling of physical vulnerability as well as her belief that she was *completely and utterly defenceless* (Louise, 254-255) verbally.

The actions and words of the other were significant in this sub-theme, and a number of the participants gave detailed, vivid descriptive accounts of the verbal and bodily communications of their partner. These evoked in them feelings of fear and Louise described the frightening physical hierarchy that she experienced between herself and her partner:

he kind of stands up (?) sitting down, so he can look over me or he towers over me over the bed or whatever er::: you know this time around it just, he really (?) kind of like close up in my face erm::: and you know was just absolutely stripping me down verbally (Louise, 249-252).

Louise's narrative highlights that she perceived her partner's physical appearance and the overt and subtle changes in his body language as threatening. Her account revealed that she experienced his physical movements as imposing, and there was a

feeling that she could be *overpowered* (Louise, 259). This illuminated her belief that she was in danger physically as well as psychologically under threat from the verbal *stripping down*. Her intense feelings of fear and her belief that she was in danger were revealed when she stated she was *scared for my life* (Louise, 303-304). This statement is significant bearing in mind that the perception that death is a possibility during stressful events can produce greater trauma in adults (Morgan, Hazlett, Wang, Richardson, Schnurr, Southwick, 2001). Louise's account illuminated that she experienced this *stripping down* as something which depleted her to the extent where she felt she had *nothing left* with which to defend herself (Louise, 302).

This seemed to amplify feelings of powerlessness and defencelessness, which gave rise to a greater sense of vulnerability. Louise connected her feelings of powerlessness, defencelessness and her belief that she was about to be destroyed with her need to defend herself physically:

I had nothing left and I had to get him, I had, to one stop him from talking and two get him away from me and so my first reaction was to punch him in the face (Louise, 294-296).

Louise's account revealed that she perceived her violence as a way to create space between her and her partner. She perceived her violence as a way to *get him away* from her thus escape and survive a situation in which she perceived herself as at risk of being *destroyed*:

no defence verbally, no defence left mentally, I, I, I had nothing and it was at that point that I had nev-been at, with him before where you know, I just didn't know, I didn't, I had no, I didn't know what was going to happen next (Louise, 279-282).

Louise's narrative revealed that, prior to her use of physical force she experienced a feeling of being unarmed, with no verbal or psychological defence mechanisms at

her disposal. It highlights the disorientating and unpredictable nature of the context she was in and her difficulty gauging what was about to happen. The feeling that there was a threat of violence was shared by Jennifer and her account illuminated her feelings of fear toward her partner before her own acts of violence arose:

he would grow and he would grow and he would grow with the, with the aggression and he never listened to what you were saying so what was the point so wor- no effect, no effect and I would feel like, you know err a, quite intimidated quite scared in fact when he was like that, I didn't know or I couldn't say for sure what he would do and he scared me, he did scare me it was like I need to just close this down (Jennifer, 59 – 65).

The degree of unpredictability experienced by some of the participants gave rise to feelings of hyper-vigilance. It is worthy to note that hyper-vigilance or what is also known as hyper-arousal can be an aftershock or rather, a symptom that can be experienced by individuals after a traumatic event (Hughes & Jones, 2000; Hughes & Rasmussen, 2010). Furthermore, hyper-vigilance is a symptom of posttraumatic stress disorder and is often observed in women who have been victims of an assaultive attack from a partner or one in which their physical being has felt under threat (Schwartz, 2012; Yamawaki, Ochoa-Shipp, Pulsiper, Harlos & Swindler, 2012). There is also evidence which shows that those with symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder can be more inclined toward using violence therefore a cycle of abuse begins to repeat itself in some instances (Schwartz, 2012; Yamawaki, Ochoa-Shipp, Pulsiper, Harlos & Swindler, 2012). For some of the women their feelings of hyper-vigilance were linked with their prior experiences of violent or abusive relationships, which could indicate the development of symptoms closely aligned with those belonging to posttraumatic stress disorder (Richards, 2011). For instance, Deborah attributed her tendency to use violence in her current relationship with a prior experience of being victimised:

and I cower and he goes, I am not going to hit you like force of habit but if I think that he looks angry or going to hit me or something then I hit him first, sort of, I don't want to be hurt again like I was in the past (Deborah, 49-52).

It is interesting to note that some research has shown that once exposed to a traumatic event, the risk of experiencing a subsequent traumatic event in one's life is substantially increased (Richards, 2011). It has been found that women, in particular, are significantly more likely to report experiencing abuse such as domestic violence if they have had prior experiences of such in previous relationships or exposure to violence in childhood (Richards, 2011). Deborah's narrative highlighted her sense of a kind of atmosphere of threat in her relationship and her perception that her partner looked like he might *hit me or something*. Following what was perhaps a kind of flashback to a previous traumatic incident in her life, Deborah connected her perception that her partner might also strike out and hit her, with her use of violence toward him subsequently.

Two of the women connected their violence with historical experiences of being victimised. A further two women attributed their violence, in part, to their upbringing and their relationships with violent, alcoholic mothers. This highlighted a broader relational trauma that seemed to be enmeshed and muddled with their current situations. For instance, Emma recounted how her childhood was peppered with violent incidents between her parents and she connected those experiences with her violent actions toward her partner in the here and now:

I think the reason why is probably two things maybe I, its because of my experiences growing up in a kind of a violent household where there will be years of everything being fine and then a few years of things being violent and erratic and erm my mum and dad were fighting and drinking and even in those years after when it, when it stops and there is a few years after there is always that anxiousness because I guess they betrayed my trust in a way and I am always on

edge because of that and always a little bit scared – maybe that has had an effect (Emma, 188- 194).

As mentioned previously, exposure to traumatic events such as witnessing domestic violence at an early age in childhood has been connected with the development of symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, which can occur weeks, months or even years after witnessing the initial traumatic event (Hughes & Jones, 2000; Levendosky, Huth-Bocks, Semel & Shapiro, 2002). It has been argued that women who witness traumatic events in childhood lose trust in parental relationships and their beliefs are altered about the safety of the world in which they live (Herman, 2001). In essence, the survivor of the traumatic event experiences a sense of betrayal from the person who is loved and who is supposed to be a nurturing, caring figure and these feelings can be transferred into adult relationships (Levendosky et al, 2002).

There is some evidence that survivors of traumatic childhood events have difficulty modulating arousal, which is possibly due to the effects of trauma on their serotonin levels. Furthermore, they may experience intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolise or resemble an aspect of an historical traumatic event, almost as though the body remembers the physiological reaction to the previous traumatic incident (Herman, 2001; Rothschild, 2000). Importantly, some evidence shows that there may be differences between a child's brain who has been raised in a supportive, loving environment and a child who was raised in a household where they witnessed domestic violence. For the child raised in the latter environment, he or she may develop the sense that she is in constant danger, a state that is also known as the 'fight or flight' response (Schwartz, 2012).

The hyper-vigilance experienced by some of the participants could account for the predominance of the term *fight or flight* (Emma, 110-111, Carla, 255), in their narratives and the physical corollaries to their violence. This term was used to describe their internal feeling states in relation to some of the incidents they encountered. The notion of *fight or flight* implies the presence of a perceived threat and suggests the women felt they were in danger. It also indicates energy and could be the mechanism through which they were mobilised to violence. Levine (1997) claims that when threatened 'fight, flight or freeze and flop' are well documented human responses that are instigated by the amygdala upon detection of a threat. Levine explained that the amygdala responds to the threat in the way it perceives will most likely lead to survival (Levine, 1997). Herman (1992) warns that the fight response may be employed by the threatened person and that overt aggression may be used as opposed to more subtle fight behaviours. Furthermore, it is argued that a person who is successful in actively defending against a threat is less likely to develop trauma symptoms than one who uses passive defences such as freeze or flop (Herman, 1992).

I can feel my hands tremble my cheeks go red and flushed, I feel shaky and I feel, my voice trembles and I can't speak rationally (Carla, 127-128).

Carla described the fear and bodily change she experienced, which accompanied and aggravated her ability to communicate to her partner during an argument. Research shows that for some women who have experienced a traumatic event, normal physiological reactions to stress such as hyper-arousal may repeat themselves in an altered or exaggerated form even after the trauma is over (Richards, 2011; Schwartz, 2012).

THE ALL ENCOMPASSING EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

When describing their experience, at every step the women perceived their violence as connected with an array of undesirable, intolerable and interwoven emotions. The women saw these powerful feelings as connected with the triggers of their violence and for many their violence was perceived as associated with a potent, heady *mixture* (Louise, 330), of intermingled and intensely felt emotions which rapidly shifted and fluctuated in time. The women perceived their violence as connected with the primary emotions of frustration, anger, shame and worthlessness. These emotions are presented as sub-themes due to their prominence in the participant's narratives, which they perceived as exerting a powerful impact in mobilising them toward violence. Sweeping through their physical being, these emotions were felt by the women in their heads as well as deeply in their bodies. Although shame and worthlessness were often experienced by the women in the aftermath of a violent act, those feelings were perceived by some of the women as feeding into their frustration, and exacerbating their anger subsequently. Thus a cycle or *pattern* of emotions were perceived as connected with and perpetuating the violent experience for a number of the women.

FRUSTRATION AND ANGER

Persistent and unshakable feelings of frustration were perceived as connected with the triggers of women's violence. The participants' irritation and annoyance stoked a continual sense of frustration that appeared to underpin their violence. Underlying this mix was a fusion of helplessness and powerlessness at being shut out, ignored or blamed.

and the frustration of not being understood, not listened to and I don't think hitting him is going to make him feel like that but I know it is going to make him hurt physically (Emma, 307-309).

Carla perceived her frustration as having a layered quality to it and there is a sense that it builds up in the moments before her violence:

how I am a complete nightmare then won't speak to me so then I am triple frustrated, or quadruple frustrated (Carla, 355-356).

For Carla, her existing level of frustration was multiplied by her sense that she was not being listened to and unfairly blamed by her partner for searching through his emails. Carla saw her attempts to talk to her partner about his infidelity as futile, which she felt increased or *quadrupled* her feelings of frustration. There was a real sense, in her narrative, of mounting pressure and growing frustration.

Frustration knocked steadily on the door to anger, and it stirred those feelings for a number of the women:

it is just really frustrating to the point where it builds up anger and then you just want to cry or hit him (Emma, 180-181).

Emma's narrative revealed that she connected her feelings of frustration with her anger. This illuminates that, for Emma, her feelings of frustration are perceived as feeding into her anger. Emma's account highlighted that she wanted to "cry" or "hit" her partner which at first seemed to indicate opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of a response to his actions. Crying serves many functions in women and it has been argued it is a type of attachment behaviour (Nelson, 2005). Furthermore, crying is "aimed at recharging and rebalancing internal equilibrium through human

connection” (Nelson, 2005, pp.23). Thus it could be that Emma hoped to elicit comfort and support from her partner as well as empathy through crying. Other researchers have highlighted that crying is deemed a more desirable trait in women as opposed to aggression (Bem, 1974). Although tears are often associated with sadness, Warner & Shields (2007) state that crying can still be a volatile human behaviour and that it is often an expression of anger. Therefore, in Emma’s situation, crying or hitting her partner could be a way for her to release angry feelings. In that sense, Emma might be seeking some kind of relief from her pent up anger and frustration.

Permeating every step of the incident, anger was perceived as something which accumulated, rose, and had a multi layered quality to it in the build up to their violence. For instance, Laura perceived her anger as something which *kind of piles up* (Laura, 74), and a number of the women experienced a tipping over and spilling out of angry feelings. A highly prominent emotion, anger simmered and rose in the women’s accounts before erupting in what they perceived as an unstoppable *stream* (Melanie, 249) and *energetic wave* (Louise, 378) that they connected with their violent acts.

Anger was experienced as all-consuming for some of the participants. For Carla, her anger was perceived as having a colour *I kind of see red* (124) and accompanied by a kind of red mist. The colour red could indicate danger, heat and energy. This highlights the intensity of Carla’s anger and gives a sense of the energy that might have been behind her angry feelings.

Experienced at a bodily level, anger was identified by some of the women as coming from the inside and it was felt to be accompanied by an internal change. A number of the participants gave rich descriptions of what anger felt like which highlighted that anger had a kind of ‘felt’ meaning for the women. For instance Melanie revealed that: *letting it go but I could feel myself really quite angry with him inside* (Melanie, 54).

The participants’ anger was perceived as connected with the bodily change they experienced before and during a violent act. Carla perceived her anger as being connected with her physical, bodily reactions and she recalled how her anger made her tremble and shake. Because fear is often associated with physical shaking or trembling, perhaps that emotion was also interwoven with the women’s anger: *but what I feel like is that I shake with anger* (Carla, 84).

For some of the women, anger was felt to be something that took place in their heads as well as their bodies: *it’s something I can’t control when I’m raging in my head* (Melanie, 153). Melanie’s use of the word “*rage*” indicates a step change in her anger. This term was used to convey an almost higher level, extreme form of anger by some of the women. Rage was perceived as anger at its most powerful and a number of the women perceived rage as dangerous and terrifying.

Maddened by the actions of a partner, anger was perceived as something that was directed outward forcefully toward the other in an outpouring of expletives and violent acts. Melanie described her anger as a crashing *tidal wave* (Melanie, 250), which illuminated her sense of the force that is behind her angry feelings. For a

number of the women, this tidal wave of anger seemed to subside and it gave way to a self-directed self-loathing and mortification among the women for having been violent. Their emotions swung between anger at the other and self-flagellation and were shrouded by a persistent unease as to where to place the blame.

A pervasive emotion, the intensity of angry feelings was expressed by Emma as she recounted the moment when she hit her partner after discovering his use of pornography:

fell down and I just, made me so angry, I got up and I hit him so hard, really hard, and I didn't stop (Emma, 134-135).

The other was perceived as the source of anger when Susan stated: *I guess I get angry at him for, for having that baggage* (Susan, 83). Susan's narrative revealed her difficulty coping with stress in her relationship with her partner and his on-going contact with his ex-wife. Susan connected those circumstances with her angry feelings. Susan's account highlighted that she released her anger outward toward her partner in a physical way. However, her sense of relief was momentary and she perceived it as giving way to a deep self-loathing and berating: *I hate myself for it of course I do* (Susan, 97).

It seemed as though some of the women re-internalised their anger and engaged in a battle with themselves for having failed to deal with their situations or their feelings in a different way. This highlighted that there was an underlying sense of

failure and a feeling that they were unable to cope for some of the women. Emma's narrative revealed that she berated herself for not leaving her partner:

I would just get really cross with myself thinking you are pathetic why don't you just leave (Emma, 164-165).

There was a belief that there had to be “*a better way*” (Laura, 8-9), than resorting to physical violence, which highlighted that for some of the women there was hope that they could change or find an alternative way to resolving their difficulties. It seemed clear that the women questioned and turned over the incidents in their minds repeatedly after the event.

SHAME AND WORTHLESSNESS

A number of the participants perceived their violence as connected with their feelings of shame and worthlessness. For a number of the participants, feelings of shame were perceived as being accompanied by an almost physical pain that seemed to wound the women. A number of the women experienced their feelings of shame as persistent and they described feeling bewildered by their violence. An unwavering feeling, the women perceived their shame as encapsulating their feelings of guilt, humiliation and grief at the part of themselves that they felt they had lost. Alienated from the self that they thought they knew, sadness seemed to grip the women. A few of the women expressed feelings of shame in relation to disclosing their violence, which hinted at their accompanying feelings of exposure and embarrassment. Shame fostered the urge to deny and conceal their experiences yet it also spurred their wish to deny those incidents to themselves. Isolated and

lonely, shame locked the women into silence for fear of judgement. However, haunted by their actions, it cut through the thin veneer of denial for the women on a regular basis. Linked with an anger turned inward, for a number of the women shame fed into and stoked the fire of frustration and anger within. Some of the women described feeling disgusted by their actions and perceived their violent behaviour as horrifying.

an- I am ashamed of it yeah but looking back, I feel really bad, I feel really bad (Susan, 80 – 81).

For some of the women, shame appeared to be linked with their perception of themselves as *bad* (Louise, 89) people. For some of the women, this fed into their desire to keep their violence a closely guarded *secret* (Melanie, 195). This feeling was shared by Laura who perceived her violence as something which she felt she had to keep hidden:

you feel ashamed and it is not, not something you want to announce to the world and you meet somebody and you say oh yeah you know I'm a monster (Laura, 120-121).

Although some of the women described their attempts to avoid thinking about their violent actions, their feelings of shame were felt to persist. For instance, Louise stated: *it has cast a shadow over my character* (Louise, 92). Louise's narrative revealed a feeling that she was almost haunted by her violent actions; the memories of which she could not forget.

A feeling that was impossible to expunge, shame seemed closely linked with the fear of having caused harm to her partner:

I feel ashamed that you know that one I inflicted harm on a person (Louise, 52)

Anger and violence is at odds with the traditional view of women as passive, nurturing caregivers (Chodorow, 1978). Louise's narrative revealed her perception that anger and violence were somehow at odds with stereotypical femininity and she felt that it was:

not, you know, how the womanly side should be in a relationship (Louise, 100-101).

This seemed to throw Louise into a deep pit of despair. Louise's narrative revealed a feeling that she was unable to tolerate her actions and a sense that she was horrified by what she had done. Her account highlighted that she was plagued by guilt and a constant dwelling on what her actions might mean. That appeared to throw Louise into a constant questioning of herself as a person.

At a deeper level, shame seemed connected with a sense of loss and mourning among the women. For Louise, her violence evoked powerful, raw feelings of shame and humiliation to the extent that she experienced what felt like a *deep break* (Louise, 415) internally. This might illuminate a sense of being wounded or a cutting off from a part of herself. The "deep break" Louise described could signify her attempts to split off and disavow the angry and violent part of herself.

Connected with those feelings was her perception that she was *less of a person* (Louise, 95), or someone defective and not *normal* (Louise, 381). Louise's narrative revealed that this lack of wholeness was connected with her feeling that there might be something *wrong with* her as a result of her violent actions (Louise, 382).

Tied closely to shame, a number of the women expressed feelings of worthlessness in relation to their violent outbursts. Convinced of their own badness, their narratives revealed their belief that they were not entitled to nor deserved the love, care or material items that surrounded them because of their violent actions. They carried a painful and unshakable sense of being *unlovable* (Louise, 490) and deeply *undesirable* (Louise, 106) and held a pervasively negative view of themselves. In addition, a number of the women's narratives revealed that they perceived themselves as being at greater risk of abandonment or rejection. Their violence, it seemed, shot through to the heart of a core belief that they were not *good enough* (Louise, 121). They appeared to feel not good enough as women yet also not good enough for their partners.

Describing her overwhelming feelings of worthlessness, Deborah stated:

it's like I'm not worthy I'm not worthy of anything that is how I see it you know (Deborah, 83).

Feeling undeserving of anything Laura commented:

how I deserve all this when I, I'm this type of person you know (Laura, 92).

For a number of the women, shame and worthlessness were perceived as coming together in a brewing mix, which fed into their feelings of anger and their aggression:

it weighs on your self esteem, you feel horrible about yourself and who you are as a person and then you turn around and use all of that guilt and all of that frustration and all of that frustration is the anger and then it comes out in, in violence (Laura, 139 – 141).

Laura's quote highlighted her perception that her feelings of shame and worthlessness fed into her anger and subsequently, her violence. This revealed that a cycle of (undesirable) emotions underpinned the women's violence and kept them trapped in an unending pattern of projecting and re-introjecting angry feelings. In relation to trauma theory, Laura's quote here is interesting as some research claims that aggression or violence may be an attempt to release or discharge tension that is associated with other unpleasant emotions stemming from a traumatic event, such as shame, guilt or anxiety (Beckham, Moore & Reynolds, 2000).

VIOLENCE AS THE UNRECOGNISABLE INTRUDER

A number of the women's narratives revealed that they experienced their anger and violence as something which was not felt to be their own. The women's accounts revealed that their violence was perceived as something that was 'other' to them. An unwelcome and intruding force, the women described a sense that something inexplicable, unobservable and unpleasant *rose up* (Laura) and *took over* (Melanie, 256). There was a sense that the women were passive to this change within themselves and that an external entity had invaded their bodies and through them ejected its force. Thus anger and violence were perceived by some of the women as entering the body from the outside, which they were unable to prevent. For a number of the women, their sense that something *took over* was accompanied by a feeling that they had lost control and they connected this loss of control with their difficulty remembering the violent event. So unrecognisable and abhorrent was their violence, that a number of the women saw themselves as dehumanised during

a violent act. In their violent acts, participants seem to perceive themselves as having transformed into a monstrous and alien ‘other’.

POSSESSED BY AN ALIEN OTHER

As host to an invading, alien other, the women saw their actions as belonging to something or someone else. For many, their narratives revealed there was a sense of some internal change and awareness of an emerging unrecognisable stranger.

So for me to be reactive towards, towards a man to that extent is very alien to how I've been brought up and to how I've, you know, how I would view or what I have been brought up to view as normal behaviour (Louise, 485 - 487).

Louise's narrative revealed that there was something *alien* about her behaviour toward her partner. Louise perceived her violence as being at odds with what she considered *normal*.

Laura's narrative revealed that she perceived her actions as not only uncharacteristic but the entire experience of perpetrating domestic violence as one in which she felt she was dehumanised:

calm down then it's almost like I am fine and I am almost human again but it's almost like I am not thinking clearly at all I am not almost not human really (Laura, 38 – 40).

Laura's perception that she is *not human* during a violent act may indicate that she feels disconnected and detached from her self and her body during the moments in

which she behaves aggressively. This feeling of disconnect or dissociation is what Goldberg & Freyd (2006), and others have described as a common response to a traumatic or stressful event (Goldberg & Freyd, 2006; Nijenhuis, van der Hart, 2011; Steinberg & Schnall, 2001). They claim that this level of dissociation may serve as a psychological defence which keeps traumatic experiences and intolerable affects out of conscious awareness (Nijenhuis & van der Hart, 2011). It has been argued that trauma such as emotional, physical or other kinds of abuse experienced in one's home can trigger symptoms of dissociation (Tang & Freyd, 2012) and that women, in particular, are likely to experience increased symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder when the trauma they encounter is perpetrated by someone with whom they share a close relationship (Tang & Freyd, 2012).

To a degree, the difficulty with making sense of their experiences was superseded by eschewing their actions as those of an entirely different person altogether. For instance, in viewing herself as undergoing some form of change or transformation during a violent act, Laura stated:

it's almost like I am a very calm patient person and then someone takes that one little step too far, it's almost like the hulk where you just turn angry and you just push that (?) it like flips a switch in my head and I'm just angry and just becomes a totally different person and not the person everybody knows me as not the person who is happy, cheery but angry, mad, violent you know (Laura, 29-33).

Laura's quote here and her description of herself as a *totally different person* may highlight the presence of a particular symptom of dissociation known as depersonalisation in which the sufferer experiences a sense of detachment, a feeling that they are disconnected from oneself, together with a feeling of being a stranger to oneself (Accortt, Freeman & Allen, 2008; Breslau, 2009). The latter has also

been termed ‘identity alteration’ in which the individual has a sense that they are behaving as though they are a completely different person (Nijenhaus & van der Hart, 2011).

Laura’s account revealed the volatility of the violent experience and her emotions. There is a real sense of the suddenness of her anger which ignited her violence like the flip of a *switch*. The extremes of behaviour that are revealed in her account seemed to baffle Laura, and she appeared to have no real sense of what happened in-between them. Laura’s account revealed her distinction between a self whom *everybody knows me as* and a self that is *angry, mad, and violent*. Laura perceived the latter as being a *totally different person*, which she appeared to be unnerved by. There was a real sense in Laura’s narrative that she was grappling to make sense of these two different people or sides of herself and how they formed part of her self. Indeed, it is not uncommon for those who experience dissociation to have an accompanying or residual feeling of confusion particularly concerning one’s identity and an inner, lasting struggle about one’s sense of self (Cromer & Smyth, 2010; Ellis, Nixon, Williamson, 2009). Laura’s narrative revealed that she appeared to experience a kind of fragmentation of her sense of self into these two opposing, paradoxical parts.

Perhaps to master this confusion, a number of the participants appeared to hand over responsibility for their violence to something or someone else. The women perceived the experience of perpetrating domestic violence as one in which the body was almost a passive medium through which something external, inexplicable

and unpleasant *rose up* and *took over* (Melanie, 256). A deeply unsettling experience, Louise recounted how:

erm I, it was quite erm it was almost like something had kind of risen up on the inside and it was almost like, it was it was almost, kind of, you know, I don't know whether to call it a righteous act (Louise, 366-369).

The *rising up* of these unknown forces is almost like an act of possession.

It seemed difficult for some of the participants to put words to and articulate their feelings around this notion of possession. Their accounts were peppered with nonsensical sounds and long pauses as they struggled to convey their internal experience(s). For instance, Melanie described how:

got to him it was like something took over and I was like urrggh and I just straight away punched him (Melanie, 256).

Melanie's sense that *something took over* could indicate her difficulty with accepting responsibility for her violence. Melanie perceived her violence as something which was out of her control and *took over*. Melanie's narrative revealed her sense that her internal feelings are alien and this illuminated her struggle to engage with her angry, violent feelings.

There was a real sense in a number of the women's narratives, that once possessed by this alien entity, they had no control over their behaviour and they were mastered by this other presence. Perhaps in a bid to distance themselves from their actions, the women viewed their violence as resistant to their control: *it kind of takes over my thoughts and actions* (Laura, 57).

This puppeteer that seemed to control their actions was difficult for a number of the women to name. As mentioned previously, in *The desire to be heard*, a few of the participants referred to this alien other as “it”. With no gender and no name, the “it” that took over them remained elusive, unknowable and incomprehensible to the women. The majority of the women appeared to view their violence as this alien other and perhaps in doing so they seemed to deny themselves access to understanding their behaviour and engaging with their angry, violent feelings.

The invasion of this alien other was experienced by a number of the participants as something which they could not control. This seemed to be connected with their feeling that their acts of violence were not their own, therefore, they could not have control over their behaviour. All the women in the study perceived themselves as having lost control during their acts of violence, which they attributed to their sense that something else had *taken over*. A number of the participants connected their loss of control with their powerful feelings of anger and frustration. Underpinning the loss of control was a feeling that the pent up pressure of anger and frustration was being released. A number of the women seemed unnerved by their loss of control and their narratives revealed their feelings of fear and concern as to where that might lead.

or at least when I get into a rage I erm, it, like I said it's like the button can't go off then and it's like I totally lose control and I just can't deal with it (Melanie, 246-247).

Melanie's comment that the *button can't go off* highlighted her struggle to regain control. For a number of the participants, violence was seen as a part of themselves that was outside of, or immune to, their control. A number of the women connected

their violence with their feeling that they were invaded by this alien ‘other’. Some of the participants appeared to perceive this alien ‘other’ as impossible to tame. The women’s narratives revealed a feeling that something had been unleashed within them.

Susan’s narrative revealed her sense that she was powerless to prevent her violence from occurring. Susan described an incident in which she pushed her partner against a wall. This occurred during an argument she had with him about his ongoing contact with his ex-partner: *it is almost as if I kind of have to do it* (Susan, 94). For many, their accounts revealed that they perceived their violence as something which they could not stop or control and they appeared to believe that regaining control was impossible:

I think it’s like something that you can’t control or that I can’t control when I get to that stage when I’m raging in my head (Melanie 113).

The force and uncontrollability of their violence was conveyed in their narratives through descriptions of their anger as an *energetic wave* (Louise, 378) and an *uncontrollable stream* (Melanie, 249) that *whooshed out* (Louise, 372). The participants’ narratives highlighted that their violence was experienced as something almost innate which had to run its course or burn itself out. The link to water in their descriptions illuminated that their violence was felt to be hard to contain and the word *wave* implies something which cannot be stopped.

A number of the women experienced this feeling of possession and the accompanying loss of control they felt as something which they experienced in their minds as well as their bodies during their acts of violence. For instance:

I can't really remember too much about it so it is like I just completely lose it, I lose my mind, just really crazy (Susan, 28-29).

The absence of control gave some of the women a sense of going *crazy* (Susan, 29) or *nuts* (Susan, 88).

For a number of the women, the feeling of possession and the loss of control was connected with their difficulty remembering their violent experiences. A number of the women's narratives revealed that their violence was accompanied by or shrouded in a disorientated, muddled feeling, which interfered with and distorted their perceptions at the time of their actions and after the event. For instance, Susan's account revealed her struggle with recalling her violent acts as she perceived those as shrouded by a hazy, blurry whirlwind.

I can't even remember why things happen, it is all really blurry and it all gets really messed up (Susan, 47-48).

Susan experienced her violence as something which gets *really blurry* and messy. Dissociation has been found to be accompanied by a kind of amnesic affect, in which memory is altered and the individual consequently struggles to recall what has happened (Steinberg, 2001). However, traumatic events such as these can also overwhelm a person's ego capacities to understand and make sense of what has happened (Herman, 1992). A number of the women's narratives revealed that they

felt as though they were detached and disconnected in some way during a violent act. For instance, Melanie stated:

there is a part of me that is detached if that makes sense (Melanie, 265).

There was a feeling that this detachment served to keep their feelings of guilt at bay as well as their memories of their violent acts. This goes back to dissociation serving as a kind of defence mechanism against intolerable affect and experiences (Nijenhuis & van der Hart, 2011) and that the sufferer can feel as though they are momentarily disconnected from themselves and their surroundings.

Symptoms of dissociation can be a consequence of isolated or repeated traumas, the effects of which can include an altered sense of one's memory, identity and consciousness (Steinberg, 2001). I wondered if what some of the women were experiencing here was compounded by historical childhood traumas and witnessing domestic violence in their homes.

my mum used to hit my dad .hhh I witnessed parts of it you know and erm I could always tell when something had happened, you just know as a child and its really weird whether I have learnt that behaviour from my mum or whether I've mirrored that in my relationship now you know (Melanie, 204 – 207)

For instance, reflecting on her childhood and the traumatic events she witnessed, namely, her mother perpetrating domestic violence toward her father, Melanie questioned whether violence was something she had *learned*. There is some evidence that individuals who are exposed to traumatic events during childhood may go on to re-enact or recreate trauma in what is known as trauma repetition or what Freud named repetition compulsion (Demarest, 2009; Freud, 1914). It has

been argued that this process is a way to resolve the irresolvable, but a bid nonetheless to bring resolution to a historical trauma.

Reflecting on her childhood, Deborah also recalled how violence was *all she had ever known*:

I saw it when I was a kid, growing up all through my child.... I just saw violence from my mum to my dad then my dad to my mum my brothers - to each other, do you know what I mean, I have seen it, seen it so many times and... obviously, you know I, I don't, well I obviously know the right from wrong but as, as you grow up err through your childhood, that is all you know, you don't know any other, you don't know any other life (Deborah, 101 – 106).

As mentioned previously, it is interesting to draw a parallel here between Deborah's narrative and the research which suggests that witnessing or being subjected to violence in childhood may mean that a person is more likely to be aggressive in adult intimate relationships compared to those without a history of childhood trauma (Bevan & Higgins, 2002). There is also evidence that cumulative traumatic events can lead to chronic posttraumatic stress disorder (Bevan & Higgins, 2002). It is believed that children are more sensitive to trauma given their less well developed cognitive structures and their great dependence on parental figures (Levy, 2000).

THE STRUGGLE TO FATHOM AND BEAR THE REALITY OF ONE'S AGGRESSIVENESS

A number of the women's narratives revealed their difficulty comprehending their violence and their confusion and struggle to understand how their violence arose. This theme highlights the participants struggle to sit with their violence and what that meant to them. For some of the women, their narratives revealed that they

perceived their violence as having a number of negative connotations which impacted on their identities as women. This seemed connected with their struggle to integrate or see their violence as a part of themselves and their desire to reject their violence. It has been argued that as a result of a traumatic event, defensive dissociation of the cognitive and emotional components of the trauma can occur, making it difficult for the person to be able to integrate the experience (Richard, 2011). The women's feelings of disdain and disgust for their violence left them locked in a battle and a continuous grappling with what they had done, with no avenue it seemed to forgive themselves:

it's not womanly, to, to be violent it's not, you know, how the womanly side should be in a relationship, you know (Louise, 98 - 101).

Louise's account highlighted her struggle to integrate this violent, aggressive part of herself which she deemed as *not womanly*. Louise's narrative revealed that she masculinised her violence and perceived her actions as a *kind of more masculine thing* (Louise, 382). That appeared to throw Louise into confusion and there was a feeling that she struggled to understand her self. Her narrative revealed her belief that she had behaved like a man would behave and Louise connected her perception of her violence as being a *more masculine thing* with her feeling that she was *less of a woman* (Louise, 135). For instance, her account revealed her belief that:

it's definitely not normal to react towards a man erm that's where it kind of, of comes down to feeling like, not a desirable person, you know err less of a woman (Louise, 488-490).

Louise's narrative illuminated that she perceived her violent actions as more rooted in masculine behaviour which she connected with her belief that her violence was not *normal*. That appeared to give rise to a feeling that she was *less of a person*

(Louise, 95) and her narrative revealed her belief that her behaviour was *majorly wrong* (Louise, 395). Louise's account showed that her violent actions were gnawing at her self concept and how she perceived herself as a woman.

There is evidence that after a traumatic event, either isolated or repeated, that an individual may develop dissociative tendencies through which their sense of identity may be altered (Steinberg, 2001). For instance, Nijenhuis & van der Hart (2011) refer to this phenomenon as 'identity confusion' in which the sufferer experiences an inner struggle about their sense of self and who they are as a person.

The women's narratives revealed rapid changes in their perceptions of their violence and their accounts showed swings between a desire to address and understand their violent actions to denial, rejection and minimisation of the violent self. Feelings of disbelief, disappointment and incredulousness at their violence were frequently mentioned. This felt dissonance coupled with the sense that their violent behaviour(s) was not *normal* (Jennifer, 101) seemed to contribute to their self-doubt and exacerbated their distress. The concern and doubt as to whether their acts of violence were *normal* gave way to painful emotions and further attempts to distance or disown their behaviour as not *natural* (Jennifer, 102). For instance, Louise stated: *it's just not (cries) it's just not within my nature* (Louise, 407).

Participants felt perplexed by their acts of violence. The disharmony between their acts of violence and their own self image appeared to foster a sense of themselves as unknowable and *unrecognisable*. This seemed to really unsettle and frighten some of the women. Carla's narrative revealed that she perceived herself as unrecognisable which she connected with her acts of violence:

I become unrecognisable it's, it's just not, like anyone that knows me would never ever think or has known me in the past or they know me now with him but it is a behaviour I have never recognised in myself (Carla, 1550157).

Trauma can lead to a sense that one's personality or identity has fragmented (Nijenhuis & van der Hart, 2011). Nijenhuis & van der Hart (2011) claim that trauma is an 'integrative deficit' or rather, a breaking point of the personality before, during or after an event beyond which integration of the experience is not possible. They claim that the person's personality can become increasingly divided in their attempts to continue to function while avoiding traumatic memories and trying to reject certain experiences (Nijenhuis & van der Hart, 2011; Steele & Malchiodi, 2011). Carla's quote outlined above also highlights a common symptom of trauma and dissociation named identity alternation in which the individual feels as though they have behaved like a totally different person (Nijenhuis & van der Hart, 2011).

Jennifer's account revealed her feeling that she was appalled and unnerved by her violence and her attempts to reject that: *it's not who I am, it's not, it's not who I am and it's not who I want to be, it's not the type of behaviours that I want brought out in me* (Jennifer, 52-53). Jennifer's narrative revealed her disbelief in her violence and her desperation to convey that her violence is *not who* she is. Jennifer's narrative highlighted a sense that she was disturbed by her violent actions and this seemed to be connected with her attempts to reject the notion of her violent self.

Laura's narrative revealed her perception that her violence was all she could see whenever she looked in the mirror and that it pervaded and changed her identity in a significant way:

it's that big wart on your face that you just can't ignore versus a little freckle it kind of becomes who you are (Laura, 158-159)

The participants' accounts highlighted the difficulty they had with owning their behaviour. Furthermore, their accounts showed their desire to shift and externalise the blame:

it is not my behaviour and the thing that really upsets me is that I have lowered myself (Jennifer, 92 – 93).

Jennifer's narrative revealed that she perceived herself as having reached the very depths of unacceptable behaviour as she had *lowered herself*. Her account implied a change in her self perception and there was a feeling that she had lost some self respect.

Melanie's account revealed her wish that she could get rid of her violent behaviour altogether:

I said it's a behaviour that I don't really want to have (Melanie, 27).

For many, their accounts highlighted their feelings of disappointment and disbelief in their violence toward a partner and this appeared to be connected with a weighing up of the "me" versus "not me" part(s), of themselves. For some of the women, their violence not only left them with a feeling that they were *not normal* (Jennifer, 101), but a nagging fear of an unknown part of themselves and their capacity for destructiveness:

I felt quite fearful of you know that kind of what I, what I, what I could do if I there again, if I felt like that again I was quite scared of what I, what I, you know, how I

would, how else I would react it made me question my own boundaries (Louise, 324-328).

For some of the women, their narratives revealed that they were confused, baffled and that they continually struggled to understand their violence. Many of the participants were thrown into despair as they struggled to comprehend and make sense of it:

erm I think for certain people I am sure that in certain situations there are things that have affected their life and incidents that you know have caused them to be this way but erm in my situation I would say it's kind of a big question mark, I feel like I don't know why (Laura, 171-175).

Laura's quote highlights her confusion and difficulty making sense of her violent actions and attributing meaning to that. For some of the women, there was a desire to explore their violence and their accounts showed an emerging albeit hesitant wish to understand their aggression in a bid to be a *better* partner. This highlighted that some of the women had some awareness of the impact of their violence on those around them, and there was a sense that there was an underlying guilt in that respect. Self reflection seemed painful for some of the women. However, for many, there was a desire to find alternative strategy to dealing with their problems with their partner other than through their use of violence:

I want to be a better mum I would like to be a better wife by kind of coming to terms with how I am and my personality and my, my aggression (Laura, 6-7).

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research was to explore women's perceptions of perpetrating domestic violence toward men. In particular, it aimed to focus on the women's perceptions as to how their violent acts arose. This chapter will begin with a thorough summary of the research findings. In the first section, connections will be made between the findings and the existing literature and empirical research in this domain. The second section of this chapter will consider the research findings in relation to studies which have explored male perpetrators perceptions of their domestic violence toward women. Following that, this chapter will explore the findings in relation to the threat of physical violence in the women's relationships and the workings of symbolic violence. In relation to this, the symbolic effects of marriage and the connection with an unspoken contract of some kind in the women's relationships will then be addressed. The discussion will also explore the theory of interpellation and the women's violence, the intergenerational transmission of values, and finally, there will be a discussion on Butler's notion of gender performativity. To conclude, this chapter will explore my personal reflections on the process of the research. However, I will also consider the scope for further research and the clinical implications for the field of Counselling Psychology and our work with women.

SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS AND THE LINK WITH EXISTING RESEARCH

Three key themes emerged as a result of this study including: violence in the wake of multiple triggers, the all encompassing emotional experience, and violence as the unrecognisable intruder. Overall the findings demonstrate that the participants in this study perceived their violence as having a number of different yet specific triggers. For instance, the women perceived their violence as connected with their feeling that they were not being listened to or heard by a partner. A number of the women perceived their violence as a response to feeling silenced and therefore, it became a way of conveying a message to a partner. For many, there was a feeling that their words were futile thus violence became their mode of expression where words had failed the women.

In relation to empirical research, there are a few quantitative studies which show that women use violence and aggression as a way to express themselves to a partner (Babcock, Miller & Siard, 2003; Carrado George, Loxam, Jones, & Templar, 1996; Felson & Messner, 1998; Sarantakos, 1998; Sherill et al, 2011; Sommer, 1996; Pearson, 1997). However, for a number of the participants in the current study their *desire to be heard* appeared to be connected with a deeper sense that they were not valued by a partner and a feeling that they were invisible. For several women, their accounts revealed their perception that their partner did not care about the emotional pain they felt had been caused to them. They described their feeling that they were invisible and I began to wonder about the wider picture and the degree to which the women in this study felt they were repressed and *shut out* in their

relationships with men. Consequently, I began to question what other forms of violence might be at play and I considered the workings of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2000). The notion of symbolic violence will be expanded upon in more depth in some of the final sections of this chapter.

At a deeper level I wondered if the participants *desire to be heard* had some connection with the literature which states that a woman's own desires can never be fully expressed (Worrall, 1990). This idea was originally introduced by Worrall (1990) who claimed that women will only be heard if they succumb to the dominant modes of expression and speak through a masculine discourse (Worrall, 1990). In relation to the participants who took part in this study, Deborah's narrative revealed her perception that her partner ignored her requests for help with their children and her desire to be given a greater degree of social and financial freedom. As a working class mother with two young children, Deborah had a limited educational background and employment history, yet her account revealed that she yearned for a greater sense of independence. However, Deborah perceived her partner as unwilling to hear her requests and she connected this with her feeling of being *trapped*. Deborah's predicament and her pleas to her partner for a greater sense of freedom revealed something about a state of inequality and unfairness in her relationship with her partner. These findings illuminated something about the particular position that these women held in their social worlds, and this will be touched upon in greater depth throughout this chapter.

A number of the women in this study perceived their violence as connected with their sense of injustice, betrayal and disrespect. For many, their feelings of injustice, betrayal and disrespect were connected with acts of infidelity and the discovery of a partner's contact with other women. The women perceived their violent actions as having been fuelled by powerful feelings of humiliation, jealousy, shock and betrayal which they connected with a partner's affair. Several of the women connected their sense of injustice with their belief that they had invested in their relationship in several different ways. For instance, Louise described the effort she felt she made in trying to *please* her partner and *meet his needs*. Furthermore, Jennifer's account revealed her feeling that she had been disrespected for everything she had done in terms of raising a family. Jennifer's narrative illuminated strong feelings of anger and injustice, which she connected with her discovery of explicit text messages to other women on her partners mobile phone. She described her feeling that she had invested physically and emotionally in raising their children.

A number of the women's narratives revealed their feeling that they had invested heavily in their relationships and they connected this with their powerful feelings of injustice and bewilderment. Consequently, I began to wonder if there was a feeling that an unspoken contract of some kind had been breached in their relationships. Perhaps their attempts to be "good" mothers and faithful partners meant that in their minds, a partner would be faithful to them. It is interesting to note that other qualitative studies have also found that women perceive their violence as connected with a sense of injustice and unfairness. For instance, in Eatough's study, her findings illuminated that the women connected their anger with a sense of injustice

and unfairness in their relationships with men (Eatough, 2010). Similar findings were reported by Flinck & Paavilainen (2010) when they explored female perpetrators perceptions of their violent acts toward men. Their findings included the theme *justification of violence* and it was found that the participants perceived their violence as connected with what they saw as a partner's act of dishonesty (Flinck & Paavilainen 2010).

The current study seemed to highlight a link between the women's perception that their violence was connected with a sense of injustice, betrayal and disrespect and their *desire for retribution*. This sub-theme revealed the women's strong desire and inclination to punish a partner, which they connected with their acts of violence. For many, this desire to punish appeared to have some connection with the discovery of a partner's infidelity. This raised a question around the significance of infidelity for this group of women. In particular, I began to wonder what the act of having an affair meant to the women and furthermore, how it challenged and threatened their roles. In several quantitative studies, feelings of jealousy and the desire to punish a partner's behaviour were cited by female respondents as the overriding reason for their violent actions (Cascardi & Vivian, 1995; Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991; Kernsmith, 2005; Pearson, 1997; Stets & Hammons, 2002). Similar findings were highlighted by Flinck & Paavilainen (2010) who found that female perpetrators perceived their violence as a way to punish and take revenge on a partner. Furthermore, Virginia Eatough's study found that some of the women appeared to gain a sense of satisfaction and pleasure from inflicting violent punishment on a partner (Eatough, 2010).

The findings revealed that a number of the women perceived their violence as being *set off* by feelings of fear and connected with the threat of violence in their relationships with a male partner. There are some studies which show that women perceive their violence as a means of escaping the abuse that is levelled against them or they regard their violence as a form of self-defence. The connection between female perpetrated acts of violence and self-defence is well documented and has been highlighted as a problem by a number of feminist writers. In particular, feminist writers propose that women's violence stems from male perpetrated control (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992; Dutton, 1994; Loseke & Kurz, 2005; Saunders, 1988). In a qualitative study of women's violence, Miller & Meloy (2006) found that women perceived their actions as a way to '*get away from*' an abusive male partner and that they saw their actions as an act of self-defence. It is important to note that their findings were based on group observations of women who had been placed in 'batterer' treatment programmes and they were not gleaned from individual in-depth inquiries as employed in the current study. In the present study, the analysis revealed that a number of the women connected their violence with the threat of physical violence from a male partner as well as historic experiences of physical and emotional abuse. This highlights a possible link between the women's experiences of perpetrating domestic violence and the theory of the intergenerational transmission of violence (Dutton & Holtworth, Munroe, 1997; Murrell, Christoff & Henning, 2007; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989, Widom, 1989).

Other findings included the *all encompassing emotional experience* and the women's perceptions that their acts of violence were connected with and fuelled by a myriad of unpleasant and highly distressing, volatile emotions. The women perceived their emotions as having a layered quality and building up prior to a violent act. The fluid, rapidly shifting and contradictory emotions gave a sense of the tumultuous experience that was connected with their violence. The women's narratives revealed that they experienced an array of intense and unwanted emotions in the aftermath of a violent act. For many, they perceived their emotions as feeding into and fuelling a *pattern* of violence that occurred in their intimate partner relationships.

The women perceived their violence as connected with the primary emotions of frustration, anger, shame and worthlessness. Other studies have shown that female perpetrated acts of violence are connected with feelings of frustration. For example, Miller & Meloy (2006) found that the women in their study perceived their violence as a frustration response. In the current study, the women perceived their anger as a powerful, often unbearable, yet energising emotion. Violence was perceived as a way of expressing and releasing those strong feelings of anger. Furthermore, anger was perceived by some of the women as having colour and a *boiling* sensation in their bodies, which highlighted that their anger had a kind of felt meaning to it. Similar findings were reported by Eatough as a consequence of her qualitative exploration of women's subjective experiences of anger (Eatough, 2010). In her study, feelings of shame and worthlessness seemed to be connected with the women's perceptions that their violence was serious, that it carried the potential for very serious consequences to occur and that they perceived themselves

as having the capacity to cause the other harm. In particular, their capacity for destructiveness seemed to trigger a critical evaluation of themselves as women and a comparison with the notion of the feminine 'ideal'. This highlighted something about the possible internalisation of social norms concerning femininity and a sense that they had violated those norms in some way. The women's narratives illuminated that they had some awareness of the discrepancy between stereotypical notions of femininity which prescribe women the nurturing, empathic care-giver role and, in contrast, their acts of violence.

In addition to the aforementioned, the analysis revealed that the women in this study perceived their violence as something which they struggled to own and integrate as a concrete or real part of the self. This was illuminated in their accounts through their perception of their violence as an intruding, alien other, which had entered them from the outside. Their belief that their violence was connected with an invading, alien force illuminated the women's perception that they had lost control over themselves. This part of the analysis appeared to reveal novel findings, and I am not aware of other research which shows that women perceive their violence as an intrusive, alien other. A number of the women positioned their violence as something which they saw as being at odds with their idea of femininity. For this group of women, violence seemed to gnaw at their identity and impacted on their sense of self as women. In particular, this part of the analysis highlighted that the women seemed to struggle with accepting their violence and this raises an important question as to why women struggle to own, recognise or integrate aspects of the violent self. These findings call for a closer examination of the social norms and stereotypical ideas concerning femininity that are prescribed

to and often internalised by women (Bjorkqvist, 1994; Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992; Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983; Frodi, Kennedy, 1993; Macaulay, Thorne, 1977).

The analysis revealed what appeared to be a unique finding and this was illuminated in Carla's narrative. This novel aspect relates to the more alluring, intoxicating and *exciting* elements of the violent experience. The analysis revealed Carla's perception that her violence was exciting and she perceived it as a way to capture her partner's attention and gain physical affection from him: *we have this pattern and it kind of thrills me in a way as well, it keeps me on my toes and it makes the relationship interesting although I feel half the time incredibly frustrated*" (Carla, 106-108). Carla described how her violence was followed by what she perceived as the *make up mode* (213). Her narrative revealed her belief that her partner was more *passionate* (209) toward her after a violent event, compared with his attitude toward her at other times. At first glance it might seem as though sexual arousal underpinned Carla's acts of violence toward her husband. There are a number of studies which document the link between sexual arousal and violence although that research has primarily focused on male samples (Heiman, 1977; Yates, Barbaree & Marshall, 1984). However, bearing in mind the context of Carla's violence and her perception that her violent acts were connected with her discovery of *inappropriate texts and emails* to other women, we might reframe her aggression as a response to her partner withholding affection and intimacy from her. For instance, her narrative revealed her perception that: *it took all that behaviour and all my performances for him to actually show some remorse* (Carla, 318-319). Perhaps violence had become Carla's way of eliciting care, affection and remorse from her partner where she otherwise felt it was absent.

The participants' narratives raised a number of other important questions that will be thought about and explored throughout this chapter. The key ideas that will be considered here are the notion of symbolic violence as well as the threat of a literal violence in the women's relationships. Furthermore, the significance and the meaning of infidelity to these women and the breach of an unspoken contract of some kind will be discussed. The connection between the women's violence and the intergenerational transmission of violence and family values will also be considered. In addition, the impact on the women's sense of self and their perceptions of their femininity will be explored in greater depth.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE FINDINGS AND THE RESEARCH WHICH HAS EXPLORED MALE PERPETRATORS PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR VIOLENCE.

Having discussed the main findings, it seems important to think about how they compare with the research which has explored male perpetrators perceptions of their domestic violence toward women. This seems particularly relevant bearing in mind the tendency by some researchers to treat male and female violence as the same (Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd & Sebastian, 1991; Kimmel, 2002). Holder-Dolly & Youseff (2010) qualitatively investigated male perpetrators perceptions of their violence toward women based on focus group observation. Their findings revealed that the men distinguished between their violent acts and their 'essence' as men. For instance, Holder-Dolly & Youseff elaborated that although the men acknowledged that they had done some 'abusive things' they did not perceive themselves as violent or abusive men (Holder-Dolly & Youseff, 2010). The

participants in their study rejected a violent self and it was found that they perceived themselves as 'good', 'non-smoking', 'non-drinking' husbands, who were not prone to 'putting' women down. Those descriptions were put forward by the men presumably as the absolute antithesis to the 'bad', abusive husband. The findings from the current study also show that some of the women perceived their violence as *not my behaviour*, and there were clear, repeated attempts to reject the notion of the violent self.

In particular, Holder-Dolly & Youseff (2010) found that the men in their study perceived their violent actions as connected with a partner's 'lack of respect'. It is interesting to note that the current research found that female perpetrators perceived their violence as a response to 'disrespect' from a male partner. However, the study by Holder-Dolly & Youseff (2010) showed that the men regarded the women's acts of independence such as leaving the house to go out without telling them, as disrespectful, and this highlighted the issue of control in their accounts.

The desire for power and control is often linked with male perpetrated domestic violence (Belknap & Melton, 2005; Bernhard, 2000; Brand & Kidd, 1986; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992; Dutton, 1994; James, Seddon & Brown, 2002; Kurz, 1997; Loseke & Kurz, 2005; Saunders, 1988; Tutty, 1999; Walker, 1984). For instance, Dasgupta (1999), Muehlenhard & Kimes (1999) state it is the intention to have power and control over women which drives male violence. However, recent studies show that some women perpetrate domestic violence due to a desire to control a partner, although those findings are limited (Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd & Sebastian, 1991).

The current study has revealed that a number of the women perceived their violence as a way to punish a partner's behaviour. The *desire for retribution* illuminated that several of the women sought to *get back* at and teach a partner a *lesson*. We might interpret these desires as revealing an intention to deter a partner from committing further wrongdoing and as such to modify their behaviour. This might indicate that there was an underlying element of control for some of the women in the *desire for retribution*. For many, their narratives revealed their perception that physical violence was a way to redress the emotional harm that they felt had been caused to them.

Like most punishments, it seemed as though there was an implicit or explicit desire among the women to prevent certain behaviour from re-occurring. For a number of the women, they appeared to want to prevent a partner's infidelity, the use of pornography, *inappropriate* text and email exchanges with other women, verbal insults and direct and indirect threats. Although the findings of this study revealed that control might be a factor behind the women's violence, their accounts highlighted that they perceived their violent acts as having an array of different triggers. Furthermore, their accounts revealed a type of control that seemed qualitatively different to the coercive tactics that are employed by men to isolate, dominate and control women (Johnson, 2011). For instance, we might reframe the women's actions and their *desire for retribution* as encompassing a desire to effect some form of change in their relationships with men. This seemed as though it could be a possibility taking into account that the women's narratives revealed their violence often followed their attempts to exert some form of change. For instance,

many perceived their attempts to resolve disagreements and to share their concerns with a partner regarding their behaviour in a calm and thoughtful way, as dismissed. A number of the women's accounts revealed their belief that their partner showed no desire to change and this appeared to fuel their feelings of frustration, indignation and anger.

A number of interesting findings were revealed in a study conducted by Cavanagh, Dobash, Dobash & Lewis (2001) who examined the accounts of violence that were given by men. Cavanagh et al (2001) analysed the accounts of violence that were given by men who were taking part in a Scottish perpetrator programme. They found that the men tried to mitigate or influence the way their violence was perceived by their partners and others in a bid to obfuscate their culpability and to neutralise women's experiences of the abuse. Cavanagh et al (2001) found that denial featured heavily in their accounts and that the men attempted to re-cast their behaviour as 'not really' violent. Furthermore, it was found that the men in their study tended to blame the victim. In addition, some of the participants attributed their violence to their upbringing as well as prior experiences of abuse. This finding has relevance to the findings from the current study and a number of the women made connections between their violent actions and historic, childhood experiences of abuse.

The men in Cavanagh et al's (2010) study were shown to minimise harm and the consequences of their violence toward women. However, the women in the current research perceived their violence as having the capacity to cause harm and they

appeared to be troubled by the potential for serious repercussions to occur. It is possible to draw a further parallel here between the findings of the current research and Cavanagh's study in relation to the sub-theme *possessed by an alien other*. In this sub-theme, the women perceived their violence as an intruding alien force which took over and this was connected with their feeling that they had lost control. Similar findings were reported by Cavanagh et al (2001) in relation to male perpetrators perceptions of their violence and they found that the men conceptualised their violence as a separate force that was detached from the man himself. This finding is corroborated by Morgan & O'Neill's (2001) study who found that the men in their sample constructed their violence as a product of rising, overwhelming forces from within. We might construe the women's perceptions of their violence as an intruding alien other, as an attempt by them to put distance between the self and the aggressive, violent act.

Morgan & O'Neil (2001) discovered that the male participants in their study perceived their violence as connected with a pathological agent such as drugs and/or alcohol. I found it curious that although a few of the women connected their violent acts with their drug and alcohol intake, their narratives showed that they did not tend to frequently mention such factors. That being said, it was revealed that Susan and Deborah perceived their *hormones* as a factor which played some part in their outbursts of physical aggression. Furthermore, Melanie briefly mentioned that her violence often occurred in the context of an alcohol fuelled event.

Although these findings clearly reveal that there are some similar features between men and women's violence, they also show there are several differences. In particular, there is limited research which shows that women perpetrate domestic violence in order to have control over a partner. This seems important to take into account when we consider that female perpetrators are being placed in groups that are largely based on addressing this particular factor (Capaldi & Gorman – Smith, 2003; Carney, Buttell, Dutton, 2007).

THE THREAT OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AND THE WORKINGS OF SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

It has already been mentioned that a few of the women's narratives revealed their perception that they were in physical as well as psychological danger from a partner. Their accounts revealed their belief that there was a threat of literal violence and they connected this with their own acts of physical aggression toward a partner. The threat of violence was revealed in Deborah's account when she stated: *his jaw clenches and it is almost like I can feel how much he is raging so I, I end up hitting him because I am scared what he might do* (52-53). Louise perceived her partner's physical appearance as indicative of a threat of violence and this was revealed in her account when she described how he had: *destruction in his eyes* (269). The existence of a threat of violence and the connection this appeared to have with the women's own acts of physical aggression is important, when we take in to account the research which claims that female perpetrated domestic violence occurs as a form of self defence (Straus, 1980). However, it also seems important to explore a powerful, yet invisible form of violence that could have been at play.

This part of the discussion leads me to explore and address the reader on the workings of 'symbolic violence' in the lives of these women. To begin, we must consider that the women in this study were largely from a working class background. However, Melanie was the exception and she identified as middle class. Furthermore, five of the women were non-working mothers who were financially and materially dependant on their partners. Although Louise, Susan and Emma had no dependants, Louise was also unemployed. Susan revealed that she was employed in the role of a carer whereas Emma held an administrative role. A number of the women perceived their role as that of mother, caretaker and homemaker to a partner, which seems aligned with the stereotypical notions of a woman's role in a patriarchal setting (Brown, 1979; Mennerick, 1975). For instance, Louise's narrative revealed her belief that it was her role to *honour* the other and to *meet his needs*. This implies a degree of submissiveness along with something about serving as a kind of nurturer to her partner. For a number of the women there was a feeling that they were often silenced by a partner and they appeared to struggle with what they could or could not say. There was a difficulty challenging a partner and a feeling that their wishes and desires were rarely heard. Bearing in mind these issues and the socio-economic and employment status of these women, we might consider the notion of 'symbolic violence'.

The term 'symbolic violence' was coined by Bourdieu (1990) and although it can relate to the threat of physical violence, it is primarily used to describe the tacit and almost unconscious modes of cultural and social domination that occur in everyday life (Foucault, 1989; Kelly, 1998). This form of violence is invisible and it encapsulates the processes through which symbolic interactions, behaviour and

modes of conduct sustain and reproduce structured inequalities in our lives as well as in our interpersonal relationships (Bartky, 1990; Bourdieu, 2000).

Bourdieu proposed that symbolic violence is a violence which is 'exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity' (1977, p. 405-11). Bourdieu elaborated that social agents are in fact knowing agents who contribute to producing the efficacy of that which determines them insofar as they structure what determines them (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu argued that it is in the 'fit' between determinants and the categories of perception that constitutes them as such that the effect of domination takes place (Bourdieu, 1977).

In essence, Bourdieu (1977) regarded symbolic violence as a violence which works through the fundamental assumptions and postulates that exist in society. Bourdieu (1977) states it is the degree to which social agents engage with and regard these propositions as the 'truth' which reflects the very workings of symbolic violence. Bourdieu used the term 'habitus' to capture what he believed were the social norms or tendencies which guide a person's behaviour and their thinking (Bourdieu, 1977). In short, he claimed that it is through 'habitus' that society becomes embedded in an individual in the form of 'lasting dispositions, and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them' (Wacquant, 2005: 316, cited in Navarro, 2006: 16).

In relation to gender domination Bourdieu claimed that symbolic violence can be thought of as the degree to which one takes for granted the cognitively and linguistically produced 'ideas' concerning femininity and masculinity that are

constructed in society. For instance Jeanes (2011, p. 404), states that in traditional femininity a 'girl or woman is associated with weakness, vulnerability, gentleness and to some extent invisibility'. Bourdieu (1977) argued that we live in a society where we accept a range of ideas concerning femininity and masculinity without question, and there is an underlying assumption of a 'truth' or 'naturalness'. It is through the assumption that these ideas concerning femininity are 'natural' that symbolic violence is 'misrecognised' because the social agent fails to perceive it as a subtle and insidious form of violence (Bourdieu, 1977; Foucault, 1989).

On the subject of male order, Bourdieu (1977) claimed that it is deeply embedded and he argued that it imposes itself as universal. Furthermore, Bourdieu stated that male order is visible in the sexual division of labour and that it is taken for granted through the cognitive structures that are inscribed in bodies and in minds (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu (1977) claimed that women are the 'dominated' and he deemed gender domination as an 'imprisonment' that is effected via the body. Bourdieu (1977) argued that it is through a process of socialisation in which single agents and institutions both contribute, that the structures of domination are reproduced.

Bourdieu believed that in the first instance there is the imposition of categories of thought and perception upon the dominated social agents (Bourdieu, 1977). This could include the idea that a woman's social role should encompass nurturing, caring and serving in a submissive manner (Williams & Best, 1990). Furthermore, Bourdieu claimed that once such agents begin to observe and evaluate the world in accordance with those categories, they start to perceive the social order as 'just' and 'natural' (Bourdieu (1977). Cattani, Gino, Ferrini, Simone, Allison & Paul (2014)

warn that this process perpetuates a social structure that is favoured by and which serves the interests of those agents who are already part of the dominant group. In addition, they argue that it is through this process that a kind of self-denigration can arise, which is seen in the perception that many modern women have of their bodies or more generally in their adherence to a demeaning image of woman (Cattani et al, 2014).

On that note, we might relate the idea of symbolic violence and the vision that women have of their bodies to Deborah's narrative, which revealed her distress at her partner's comments about her physical appearance and weight: *alright he's not physically hurting me but the things he comes out with oh get your weight sorted out, you are fat, you are this, you are that and it's like ok* (61-62). Perhaps Deborah's narrative reveals that the symbolic violence lies in the assumption that a woman should look a certain way. With this in mind, it could be suggested that Deborah was reacting to an imposed standard or 'ideal' which she felt she could not reach. This might cultivate her feelings of worthlessness and her belief that she is not *good enough* as a woman. Bartky (1990) harnessed this idea of a feminine ideal and in *Psychological Oppression* she wrote that the feminine body is generally expected to be small, delicate, attractive and slim. Bartky warned that the dominant culture dictates that simply any body will not do, and that women must appear a certain way if they wish to avoid social and cultural stigmatisation (Bartky, 1990). Additionally, Coward (1987) argued that the slim, feminine form "connotes powerlessness" and she stated that it inadvertently supports the imbalance of power that exists between men and women (Coward, 1987, p. 41). With a rather different view, Orbach (1989) claimed that an overweight woman who does not try to

conform to the slim feminine 'ideal' has a kind of power which threatens men, in that she does not apologise for the space that she assumes.

On a deeper level, it could be that Deborah felt she was being objectified through what Langton has termed the 'reduction to appearance' (Langton, 2009). In *sexual solipsism*, Langton wrote that objectification can encompass the process through which a person treats another primarily in terms of how they look (Langton, 2009). Deborah's account revealed her feeling that her partner did not care about the emotional pain he had caused her as a result of his comments about her weight. We might construe this as the 'denial of subjectivity' or what Nussbaum claims is the process by which the one who is objectifying treats the object as though her feelings and experiences simply do not matter (Nussbaum, 1995).

The 'denial of subjectivity' (Nussbaum, 1995) could be connected with the women's *desire to be heard*. This sub-theme revealed that the women perceived their partners as unwilling to listen and to hear about the emotional pain that they felt had been caused to them. For many, there was a feeling that they were ignored, dismissed and a sense that they were silenced. In particular, Louise's narrative highlighted her feeling that her verbal efforts were *destroyed* when she questioned her partner about his affair. Furthermore, Emma described how she felt her partner did not *care* about her feelings enough to listen. Those experiences could indicate that there is an underlying assumption that women should be passive, or rather that a woman who questions, confronts or challenges i.e. the actions, words and intentions of the other, is an *undesirable* woman. For instance, Louise attempted to question her partner about his whereabouts and what she perceived as an imbalance

in the degree of social freedom in their relationship, yet she was met with what she perceived as a verbal *stripping down*.

Deborah and Laura's narratives revealed that they held the position of non-working mothers, and they were dependant on their partners for financial assistance. Their accounts illuminated their feeling that they were criticised by their partners over their approaches to mothering. Both Deborah and Laura's accounts revealed that they were met with criticism when they tried to negotiate with a partner for a greater degree of social and financial freedom. This could indicate a degree of symbolic violence through the assumption that a woman's role should appear a certain way. There was a feeling that Laura and Deborah were bound to their roles as mothers and confined to the household domain to some extent. Perhaps these women were reacting to a feeling that they were trapped and an underlying sense that their autonomy and self-determination as women was slowly being quashed.

Perhaps the subtle workings of symbolic violence could account for the difficulty that some of the women had with articulating themselves. Indeed, Irigaray states that a woman is filled with a masculine discourse, which renders her unable to fully express her own desires (Irigaray, 1975). Furthermore, perhaps this form of violence had some connection with the women's sense of bewilderment, confusion and tendency to chastise themselves as *crazy* (Deborah, 5). However, such labels serve to further disempower women (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Topper (2001) claimed that this insidious form of domination can also subtly be maintained through the development of personal bonds in which the participant fails to recognise the acts of domination and feels emotionally and materially

indebted to the dominator. I wondered if there was a feeling that Laura was materially indebted to her partner when she stated: *how I deserve all this when I, I'm this type of person* (Laura, 92).

THE SYMBOLIC EFFECTS OF MARRIAGE AND THE UNSPOKEN SYMBOLIC CONTRACT

In connection with symbolic violence, I wish to briefly consider the symbolic effects of marriage and long term partnerships for women. This seems relevant taking in to account that the majority of the women who took part in this study were married or had been cohabiting with a partner for several years. Furthermore, a number of feminist writers have long regarded marriage as one of the fundamental sites of women's oppression and it has even been described as the pillar which supports patriarchal power (Moller-Okin, 1989). Many feminist writers believe that marriage supports the gendered division of labour (Moller-Okin, 1989, Wally, 1986). For instance, Moller-Okin (1989) questioned whether marriage positions women as inferior while simultaneously casting them in a role where their options, ambitions and desires are reduced.

Moller-Okin (1989) argued that marriage has a significant impact on women and that it exerts a vice like grip whereby women feel compelled to conform to a range of 'symbolic standards'. It has already been argued that symbolic violence works through thoughts (Bourdieu, 1990) and Moller-Okin claimed there is a subtle pressure on women to take on the domestic and care-taking roles when ensconced in marriage. In addition, she believed that married women are less able to seek

independence or aspire to prestigious roles and occupations in society (Moller-Okin, 1989). Furthermore, marriage often holds a particular meaning for women and Bevacqua (2004) claimed that marriage reinforces the idea that the monogamous, heterosexual union is important.

The issue of monogamy seems important to consider bearing in mind that a number of the women in this study talked at length about their acts of violence and how they perceived those as related to a partner's infidelity. Infidelity, it seems, holds a certain meaning for the women, and I wondered what significance this had. Several of the women appeared to perceive themselves as the 'glue' which held their families together. For instance, they saw themselves as responsible for raising the children and providing care and affection to them and a partner. In a kind of nurturing, serving role, a number of the women perceived themselves as responsible for the home and that it was their role to *meet his needs* in terms of cooking, cleaning and as Louise and Emma's narratives revealed, in a sexual sense. For many, there was a feeling that they valued their families and that they had invested in those through their physical and emotional efforts.

Carla, Deborah and Jennifer's narratives revealed there was an underlying tension with feeling financially and materially dependant on a partner. However, the acts of infidelity appeared to threaten the women and their roles within their partnerships with men. As a number of the women perceived themselves as mothers, homemakers and care-givers to a partner, the act of infidelity threatened to dismantle those roles. Perhaps there was a greater feeling of vulnerability for the women in the wake of discovering an affair. A number of the women connected

this feeling with their material and financial dependence on a partner, which highlighted an underlying fear of survival. Furthermore, when Carla disclosed her fear that her marriage might break down as a result of her partner's infidelity, she wondered if she would face a life alone. This highlighted a particular form of symbolic violence in that women are often deemed 'flawed' and failing if they are divorced, unmarried or single in society (Moller-Okin, 1989).

I considered if the acts of infidelity spoke to the women in terms of there being a broken, yet unspoken contract of some kind. Perhaps there was a sense that the shared values of respect, commitment, honesty and loyalty had all been breached. A number of the women were non-working and their relationships appeared to be consistent with patriarchal norms whereby the male occupies the role of breadwinner (Wally, 1986). With this in mind, I wondered if there was an unspoken contract that in exchange for financial and emotional safety, the women would provide domestic and emotional care (Wally, 1986).

In essence, it appeared as though the acts of infidelity and some of the other behaviours that were exhibited by their partners had a profound impact on the women, in terms of their identity and their sense of femininity. There was a feeling that their roles as caring, nurturing homemakers which held the family together were under threat and had been deeply undermined. This was revealed in Carla's narrative when she stated: *maybe I am worried that he is going to fall in love with someone else it terrifies me erm and that undermines my whole being, and everything that I am about and the bed I sleep in* (133-137). This was compounded by the women's acts of violence, which also had an impact on their self perception.

A number of the women's narratives revealed their belief that they were not *good enough* for a partner following their discovery of an affair. Furthermore, some of the women perceived themselves as worthless due to a partner's claim that they were *unfit* mothers. For Louise there was an unshakeable feeling that she was *less of a woman* and many of the women described themselves as *crazy* and a *freak* (Deborah, 5).

Several of the women's narratives revealed that this self-loathing appeared to be in connection with their belief in the existence of a feminine 'ideal'. For instance, Louise perceived her violence as *not how the womanly side should be*. Furthermore, Laura's narrative revealed her perception that her behaviour and her sense of herself as a woman was at odds with her belief in a kind of 'great' woman: *great woman is one who, who has it all and you know has a great child a great life and a great house, the perfect relationship with you know, close to their family you know, kind of just that white picket fence* (Laura, 126-128). Hirji (2011) notes the difficulty women face in separating fact from a socially constructed fiction of a feminine 'ideal'. Furthermore, Groesz, Levine & Murnen (2002) argued that the internalisation of limited themes and representations of women can be incredibly detrimental. This idea was elaborated by Simone de Beavoir (1989) who claimed that this leads to the internalisation of a 'male gaze'. This gaze, she claimed, is turned upon oneself thus leading one to evaluate and assess rather than to feel and experience one's own body organically (de Beavoir, 1989; Tolman, Impett, Tracy & Michael, 2006). It seems important to explore where these deeply embedded ideas and beliefs concerning femininity and a woman's social role could stem from.

Furthermore, it seems important to consider how we might connect this with the women's distress and their negative self perceptions.

THE THEORY OF INTERPELLATION AND THE WOMEN'S ACTS OF VIOLENCE

Althusser (1971) claimed that the answer as to how social norms and ideas about a woman's role and femininity develop, lie in the power of ideology. Dominant ideologies can be thought of as a pervasive set of ideas about masculinity and femininity that are presented to an individual (Althusser, 1971). Althusser coined the term 'interpellation' to capture the process through which ideologies address people and offer them an identity which they are encouraged to accept. In this way, the situation appears to precede the subject in that ideologies concerning femininity or masculinity address the subject thus effectively producing him or her as a subject (Althusser, 1971). Althusser claimed that subjects are 'hailed' into being and that this hailing is the work of various institutions such as schools, families, socialisation, the media, and cultural stereotyping all of whom dictate what is deemed feminine or masculine (Althusser, 1971). In essence, the concept of interpellation refers to the process by which subjects acknowledge and respond to ideologies thereby recognising themselves as concrete subjects.

In Butler's work on the fluidity and performative nature of gender, she argued that the interpellative act of the nurse who exclaims 'it's a girl' sets off, or rather, initiates the process by which a certain 'girling' then takes place (Butler, 1990). Butler (1990) elaborated that this 'girl' is then compelled to 'cite' or enact the

norms of femininity in order to qualify as a viable and recognisable subject. In essence, Butler claims that femininity is not the product of a choice but rather, the forcible citation and adherence to a norm (Butler, 1990). Furthermore, Butler's work reinforces the idea that gender norms are discursively produced ideas that are inscribed on bodies (Butler, 1990). Interpellation, it seems, initiates the process of 'girling' and it is a process that is based on perceived and imposed differences between men and women that are, however, far from natural (Butler, 1990). Butler's example helps to illuminate how femininity is an enactment of the socially sanctioned ways of 'doing girl' (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Althusser (1971) claimed however, that interpellation is so subtle that ones comes to regard their ideological self constitution as "real" rather than something that they chose to adopt (Althusser, 1971; Williamson, 1978). Althusser's (1971) ideas help to elucidate how women come to identify with certain markers and notions of femininity such as, passivity, gentleness and nurturing characteristics. Furthermore, we might use his ideas to understand how several of the women seemed unable to *recognise* their violence as a natural or tolerable part of the self. A number of the women described themselves as *unrecognisable* due to their violent actions presumably because it did not 'fit' with their desired notions of femininity. As such, their violence was felt to be something that was alien, which they could not conceive as part of their *nature*. In the *struggle to fathom and bear the reality of one's aggressiveness*, Louise perceived her violence as more of a *masculine thing* to do (Louise, 373). This felt dissonance between the women's acts of violence and the norms of femininity, left a number of them believing that they were not *normal*. For many, their narratives revealed swings in their perception of themselves as a

totally different person due to their acts of violence, and their attempts to cling to gender norms in which they rejected their violence as not a *real* part of the self.

THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF VALUES

In connection with Althusser's theory it seems important to explore a particular institution that cultivates or interpellates women as feminine subjects namely; the family of origin. The analysis revealed that four of the women perceived their violence as connected with childhood experiences. These women made reference to historic incidents of abuse and their experience of witnessing domestic violence in childhood. Two of the women revealed that they witnessed their mothers perpetrate domestic violence toward their fathers. Furthermore, Melanie's account revealed that she was questioning whether violence was something she had *learned* while Deborah revealed that she had been *surrounded* by violence as a child and it was all she had *ever known*. These findings raise an important question in terms of the relevance of the theory of the intergenerational transmission of violence but also the transmission of family values (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987).

We might conceive of family values as the standards that are derived, learned and internalised from society and encapsulate beliefs about desirable states or behaviours (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). Schwartz & Bilsky (1987) claim these beliefs impact on how we evaluate behaviours and events and they are ranked according to importance. This notion was highlighted by Rokeach (1979), who claimed that a value system is an enduring organisation of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end states of existence along a continuum of

relative importance. A number of researchers have agreed that the family is the site where such values can evolve (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993). Freud was one of the first to recognise the influence of the family on the person (Freud, 1965) and Szapocznik & Kurtines (1993) claimed that the individual is embedded in the context of the family within the context of culture. It has been argued that values can be transmitted from parents to offspring through the process of socialisation (Boehnke, 2001; Knafo & Schwartz, 2001). Williams & Best (1990) proposed that parents try to inculcate their values in children and that those values can be related to gender (i.e. masculinity and femininity). They state that values relating to femininity could include the importance of being obedient, honest, responsible and submissive (Williams & Best, 1990). It has also been argued that the family is the very site where values relating to work and the gendered division of labour are also learned. For instance, children who are raised in working class, patriarchal families where the male is the main breadwinner and the female responsible for caretaking and homemaking tasks, reproduce this situation in adulthood (Williams & Best, 1990).

The intergenerational transmission of values seemed relevant to a number of the women in this study. It is of note that Louise, who identified with a working class background, spoke at length about her belief that it was not *womanly* to be violent. Furthermore, she described her view that she must *honour* the other and meet his needs. These ideas were connected with her childhood and, in particular, her relationship with her mother. Her account revealed her perception that her mother had expected her to put her brothers' needs before her own. Louise also believed that her mother did *everything* for her father. Perhaps those experiences fostered

her belief in the values of submissiveness, obedience and self sacrifice along with something about serving as a nurturer. Furthermore, her perception that she must always *meet his needs* seemed reminiscent of the feminine shadow or the point at which the woman becomes not only other but ‘his’ other (Irigaray, 1975). Louise’s narrative revealed something about social values and her belief that she had been raised *not to hurt others*. Her sense that she had violated this code of conduct through her violence, appeared to throw her into despair. To that end, we might question how certain values around conflict resolution were shaped or neglected in the women’s lives as children. For instance, Deborah’s account revealed her perception that in her working class family of origin, violence was *around her* all the time throughout her childhood. On that note, there is some research which shows that deficit skills in regard to managing conflict and negative emotions are often rooted in familial experiences and that those can persist into adulthood for some individuals (Linder & Collins, 2005).

I considered the degree to which the values of loyalty and fidelity were inculcated in the women’s lives as children, given the significance of a partner’s infidelity. Furthermore, values related to care-giving seemed important to a number of the women particularly those who were non-working, full time mothers. For instance, Jennifer, Deborah and Laura’s narrative revealed their commitment to mothering and their sense that this was how they had invested in their relationships. West & Zimmerman (1987) state that these values are often found in adults who were raised in patriarchal, working class families.

A LAST WORD ON BUTLER'S NOTION OF GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

It seems relevant to give some thought to Butler's notion of gender performativity (Butler, 1990). This seems important given that gender has been considered as an effect of socialisation and the internalisation of values and gender norms. However, unlike those theories, Butler claims the 'law' is not internalised since there is no interior to gender and therefore, no masculine or feminine inner core or 'essence'. The appearance of substance is in fact a constructed identity that is accomplished through the performance of repeated, gendered acts (Butler, 1990). Instead Butler argues that the law is inscribed on the body and that bodies are produced which signify that law on and through the body (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1989). Butler regards gender as the result of discourse and she claims it is the repeated, consolidated gendered acts which performatively constitute the subject (Butler, 1990).

Butler claims that if gender is something which is inscribed on the body then genders can neither be true or false, but can only be the effects of a discourse (Butler, 1990). Gender is accomplished through the imitation or 'miming' of the dominant conventions of masculinity or femininity (Butler, 1990). In essence, she claims that gender is an impersonation of a set of norms or an 'ideal' that nobody actually possesses or inhabits (Butler, 1990). The idea that gender is a stylised, repetition of acts implies that gender identity is a free floating phenomenon that is not connected to a particular core or 'essence' (Butler, 1990). It can be argued, therefore, that the characteristics that are believed to be typically masculine might as easily inhabit a female body as they do a male one. This perspective could help to de-bunk claims that women are naturally non-violent and non-aggressive.

Butler also argues that if gender is a performance and something that one acts, then it must be possible to ‘act’ gender in certain ways which reveal its constructedness (Butler, 1990). On that note, it has been claimed that violent women are often perceived as ‘acting’ in a masculine way. For some, there is a belief that violent women are ‘doing’ their gender in the wrong way and Butler reminds us how those who are perceived as doing their gender in the wrong way are often punished by society (Butler, 1990). This notion of ‘doing’ gender in the wrong way reminded me of the women’s narratives and their perception that their must be something *wrong* (Louise, 382) with them as a result of their violence. In particular, Louise’s narrative highlighted her belief that her violence had *masculine connotations* and she connected this with her feeling that she was *less of a person*.

Ayman, Korabik, & Morris (2009) warn that women who are deemed as having masculine attributes continue to attract criticism and are heavily and negatively evaluated in society. However, if violent women are ‘imitating’ the masculine we might question why that is. For instance, Reay (2001) proposes that it is a woman’s way of distancing herself from the feminine and the disempowerment that comes with it. Similarly Halberstam (1998) argued that distancing oneself from stereotypical femininity is to claim a form of power. We might also wonder how women’s bodies become violent and if, as Butler, suggests it is through the repeated and consolidated acts of aggression, control, and humiliation that are perpetrated against them that slowly constructs their violent bodies. On a final note, I have also considered whether the women’s performances or ‘imitations’ of what is commonly thought of as a masculine behaviour, were an attempt by them to evoke the performances of care or a more feminine, containing function in a male

partner. For instance, Carla's narrative revealed her belief that it took all *my performances and all my behaviour to get him to show me some remorse* (Carla, 318-319).

REFLECTIONS ON THE PROCESS OF THE RESEARCH

In terms of the process of the research, I found it interesting that, during the interviews, a number of the women appeared to find the subject of their violence very difficult to articulate and convey. I noticed that the majority of the women who took part in the study seemed very thoughtful and hesitant at first, about what they said to me. I found it significant that the topic posed such challenges for the women, and I wondered if they feared how their experiences might be heard or perceived by me over the course of their interviews. I also wondered if their tentative way of talking and describing their experiences to me indicated that they had some awareness or preoccupation with how female perpetrated domestic violence is perceived within society. However, it reminded me once of again of Irigaray's (1974) notion that a woman is filled with a masculine discourse after her own speech is destroyed. As already mentioned, some of the dominant narratives around violent women consist of labelling them as "mad" or "bad", "faulty" or "evil", and I noted that some of the women had seemed to adopt those terms. I wondered who those scripts really belonged to and if a number of the women had internalised those ideas thus creating a harsh inner critic that berates them for their acts of violence. However, it also made me wonder what their fantasies were about me and if they saw me as someone who had not been affected by domestic violence or struggled with aggressive and angry feelings. It occurred to me that perhaps they

saw me as a feminine woman who somehow “*has it all together*”, which is what Laura said she longed to be.

I considered that for many of the participants, there seemed to be something that was unnameable about their violent experiences. The frequency of very long pauses, silences and nonsensical sounds within all the women’s narratives highlighted that their violence and the feelings they experienced around that was difficult for them to convey. It also seemed as though the dynamics that they experienced in their relationships with a partner were hard to understand. At times, it appeared as though some of the women did not possess the language with which to articulate their experiences and this seemed evident throughout numerous parts of their transcripts.

The hesitancy that was shown by some of the women made me think about the nature of our meeting and the potential limitations of that. For instance, I considered that once something is said during one to one interviews, that it cannot be unsaid and I wondered if any of the women struggled with or were anxious about what might happen with this information once the interviews had ended. This seemed to be the case for one or two of the women despite the fact that the issue of confidentiality was explained to them at various stages of the research. I wondered if the nervousness that I observed in some of the women was due to their expectation that any behaviour which deviates from stereotypical femininity can initiate a set of punishments (Naaman, 2008; Butler, 2009).

I also considered the fact that the data was based on participants' retrospective accounts of their violent acts. The participants who took part in the study were included on the basis that they had perpetrated at least one act of domestic violence toward a male partner in the last year. However, this could mean that their accounts were affected by their difficulty recalling those events or biases in their recall (Chouinard & Walter, 1995). It is possible, for instance, that their accounts of their violence may have been different immediately after a violent act. Furthermore, the emotional intensity of the violent experience might have had a significant impact on the participants' ability to recall the event. A number of the women who participated in the study described their difficulty remembering their violent acts, which one participant referred to as "blurry". However, other studies have shown that intense emotions can actually enhance the subsequent recall of events (Cahill & McGaugh, 1995).

I wondered what the women felt they got out of their interviews with me. For some of the women it seemed as though there was something cathartic about the entire interview process and Melanie described her sense of *relief* at having the opportunity to disclose her experiences to me and to finally be *honest* about those. In addition, Emma said that she hoped that through taking part in the study, other women would feel able to talk about their experiences of perpetrating domestic violence with more ease. However, a number of the women said that they were searching for answers, and that they hoped to have a better understanding of their violence as a result of taking part in the research. A number of the women said they were keen to read the thesis as they hoped that they would discover that some of the other women had struggled with similar issues around their violence. There was a

feeling that some of the women desired a sense of sameness and this highlighted how alienating their experiences were for them and how different they seemed to feel in comparison to the rest of the population.

A number of the women described their feeling that they were somehow different to the rest of the population due to their violent actions toward a partner. This sense of being different and in opposition to normalcy was illuminated in their descriptions of themselves as a *monster* (Laura) and *freak* (Deborah). The term *monster* and the idea that a violent woman must be a *crazy* (Susan) woman could stem from an extreme set of narratives that are cultivated by the dominant masculine group. I thought at length about the possible reasons why some of the women had adopted those terms and assigned those labels to themselves. I considered Irigaray's (1975) claim that women are filled with a masculine discourse and that their own speech is destroyed. Furthermore, Worrall (1990) states that unless women communicate through the dominant modes of expression they will not be heard and they will be disqualified as speakers. Perhaps those ideas could explain why some of the women seemed to readily label themselves as a *monster* or *crazy*. However, I considered how those terms could serve to further disempower the women and firmly root their violence in the unhelpful mad/bad dichotomy (Goux, 1992).

I was somewhat surprised that none of the women appeared to perceive their violence as arising from financial stress or the difficulty coping with family life. However, on reflection, I realised that although none of the women seemed to perceive their violence as arising from some form of financial deficit, they

described their violence as related to other types of deficits. For instance, a number of the women's accounts revealed that they perceived their violence as connected with specific deficits in terms of the communication they had with a partner, the quality of the relationship and their sense that something was being withheld. For many, there was a feeling that they were striving for more equality in their relationships. Furthermore, a number of the women connected their experiences of *lashing out* toward a partner with their desire for fairness and a greater feeling of balance in their relationships with men.

I found it interesting that two of the women connected their violence toward a partner with their childhood experiences. Melanie and Emma's narratives revealed that they witnessed domestic violence during childhood. For instance, Emma recounted the violence that she saw her alcoholic mother perpetrate toward her father as a child. Emma's account illuminated that she connected those experiences with her current difficulties as well as her feelings of hyper vigilance: *It's because of my experiences growing up in a kind of a violent household where there will be years of everything being fine and then a few years of things being violent and erratic and erm my mum and dad were fighting and drinking and even in those years after when it, when it stops and there is a few years after there is always that anxiousness* (189-193). She went on to describe how: *I am always on edge because of that and always a little bit scared – maybe that has had an effect on this relationship* (193-195).

In a similar vein, Melanie recounted how she saw her mother hit her alcoholic father: *My dad was an alcoholic and I know that my mum used to hit my dad .hhh I*

witnessed parts of it you know (203-204). Melanie's account revealed that she was questioning whether her current use of violence toward her partner was in some way connected with what she witnessed as a child: *whether I have learnt that behaviour from my mum or whether I've mirrored that in my relationship now you know* (206-207).

I found it interesting that both women appeared to be wondering whether those experiences were in some way connected with the violence they had perpetrated and I wondered whether Emma and Melanie were unconsciously experiencing a pattern of re-enacting something from the past that felt familiar to them. Perhaps this unconscious repetition was an attempt by them to understand or correct a past trauma of some kind.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH

In terms of the difficulties I encountered with the sample that were included in this study, at times I found it quite frustrating and challenging that a few of the women struggled to articulate themselves and their experiences. There were points during some of the interviews when a number of the women tended to say 'I don't know' or 'I can't explain it' and 'it's hard to explain' when trying to verbalise their acts of violence toward a partner. On occasions, the participants' seemed to rely on noises instead of words or they began to move a lot more in their chairs and give other non-verbal cues. In an IPA study this can prove challenging taking into account that the method rests on the participants' ability to convey themselves, and the researcher to interpret that subsequently (Smith & Osborne (2008)).

That being said, non-verbal cues and the sounds that were made by some of the participants as they struggled to articulate themselves were also important sources of information. I observed the points at which some of the participants looked sad, perplexed, frustrated and on a few occasions the participants appeared to express their sadness and frustration through tears. These observations were invaluable in terms of developing and increasing my understanding of the emotional intensity and turmoil that was associated with the women's experiences of perpetrating domestic violence toward men. Mehrabian (2007) also argues that it is important researchers take note of non verbal cues otherwise important information can be lost through an over reliance on text. It is likely that access to some non-verbal cues was lost through the interviews which were conducted via skype. This method of conducting interviews was also challenging in the sense that establishing a rapport was sometimes difficult due to interference and poor sound quality.

I wondered how a different approach such as that of a focus group observation might have helped overcome some of these challenges. In a focus group setting, it is possible that some of the women might have felt more at ease in talking about their experiences alongside other women who share similar experiences (Kitzinger, 1994). Furthermore, this could have helped to alleviate some of the feelings of sadness and aloneness that a number of the participants' said they felt due to their belief that they were not *normal* because of their acts of violence. Conversely however, a focus group observation might have prevented the women from sharing in-depth personal and sensitive information that they shared on a one to one basis. A further difficulty with this study was that of sample size, and it was a fairly small group of women who took part in this research. Recruitment was challenging and

this is partly due to the fact that female perpetrated domestic violence is still not recognised by a vast number of agencies and services that I approached. Furthermore, the highly sensitive and somewhat taboo nature of the topic is likely to have had an impact on the number of women who were prepared to come forward. Having the opportunity to meet some of the women via the charities before conducting the interviews was invaluable as this appeared to help alleviate some scepticism and hesitancy they had in taking part in the research. However, the recruitment process is biased toward those who are willing to share their experiences on a one to one basis, and I would be interested to know more about the experiences of those women who declined to participate.

In terms of the data analysis, my interpretations and the formation of the themes, I considered how my own experiences in relation to witnessing domestic violence could have shaped or moulded the analysis and what I may or may not have paid attention to in the data. In earlier sections of the thesis, I have drawn attention to the fact that feelings of shame are consistent with experiences of witnessing domestic violence and I wondered if this had some connection with the extent to which I picked up on the women's feelings of shame in their accounts. However, shame and worthlessness are emotions that I have also experienced in the aftermath of interpersonal conflict and as a result of heated arguments in my own personal relationships. In particular those emotions often surface when I have felt angry toward a partner and are a result of replaying the event and the tendency to internalise the difficulty. Furthermore, perhaps my own unease with feelings of anger and aggression and my sense that it does not seem to 'fit' with my ideas about femininity could account for why I paid particular attention to the women's

struggle to fathom and bear their violence and the impact this has had on their sense of self.

FUTURE RESEARCH

In terms of further research, all of the women who took part in the study disclosed that their relationships had continued despite their violent actions toward a partner. That being said, a number of the women described how they felt their violence had become a focal point in their relationships with a male partner. For instance, a few of the women described how they felt a partner placed emphasis on their violence and that their violence was deemed the *problem*. A number of the women perceived their partners as unwilling to think about their own behaviour or the circumstances which they felt triggered their violent acts. A number of the women described their growing sense of frustration, guilt and confusion in that respect. I wondered what was occurring for the men in these relationships and how they thought about or perceived the women's violence. Perhaps further research could explore the perceptions of male victims and their attitudes toward women's violence. I wondered if male victims might perceive women's violence as humorous or in some way more acceptable. However, perhaps male victims struggle with feelings of shame, embarrassment or fears that they may not see their children again if they speak out about a partner's acts of violence toward them (Hines & Douglas, 2012).

In terms of future research, it has already been highlighted that there is an assumption women perpetrate domestic violence for the same reasons as men. There are a number of studies which have explored male perpetrators accounts of

their domestic violence toward women. Anderson and Umberson (2001) used Discourse Analysis to examine constructions of masculinity and power in male perpetrators accounts of their domestic violence. They found that male perpetrators constructed their violence as lethal, explosive and natural as well as a way to engender fear in their victims (Anderson & Umberson, 2001). Such findings seem to be in stark contrast with the findings of this study. In this research, the women's narratives revealed that their violence was connected with their feelings of fear as opposed to a desire to instill that in a partner. Furthermore, a number of the women who took part in this study connected their fear with their sense that they were in physical and psychological danger. Their accounts revealed that several of the women perceived their violence as *not natural*. This finding seems to differ with the outcomes of Anderson & Umberson's (2001) study, which showed that male perpetrators constructed their violence as a natural phenomenon.

It is of note that Anderson & Umberson (2001) found that male perpetrators tended to blame the female victim for their acts of violence. Victim blaming is a common tendency among male perpetrators of abuse (Scully, 1990). In terms of further research, it might be useful to explore how women construct blame in their accounts of their violence toward men. In relation to the current study I found it interesting that the women's narratives revealed that their perception regarding who was to blame for their violence seemed to shift rapidly in their accounts. Blame lacked concreteness, and for a number of the women there was a feeling that they were justified in their actions toward a partner while at other times they appeared to blame themselves. This differs from the research which shows that male perpetrators tend to rigidly blame their female victims (Scully, 1990). Perhaps other

scope for further research might include an exploration of the cultural differences among women in terms of the expression, tolerance and motivations behind their violent actions toward men. For instance, Laura's account illuminated her perception that aggression among the women in her Chinese family of origin was not uncommon, and that it somehow seemed to be more acceptable.

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

Counselling psychologists should hold in mind the four levels of exploration that are needed to address the phenomenon of domestic violence with female perpetrators. For instance, Dobash and Dobash (1979) proposed that the individual, the inter-personal, the institutional and the ideological should be examined in trying to work with and address this phenomenon. This suggests it is important that we recognise women are located in a highly complex, dynamic system of interrelationships. Furthermore, there is some research which highlights the impact that social norms can have on women's relationship with anger and aggression (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1982; Miller, 1990; Ogle, Maier-Katkin & Bernard, 1995). This indicates that Counselling Psychologists should seek to explore with women how their adherence and conformity to a traditional feminine role has positively or negatively impacted on their sense of self and their relationship with anger, aggression and violence. This seems important taking into account the literature which states that social norms concerning femininity and what is deemed 'acceptable' feminine behaviour can prohibit or complicate women's expression of their anger. This state of affairs is thought to prevent women from developing culturally approved ways of regulating their anger and aggression resulting in outbursts of anger or violence.

Counselling psychologists might wish to explore with women their beliefs and values concerning femininity, and how those have evolved. In particular, Tolman, Impett, Tracy & Michael (2006) state it is important that counselling psychologists' explore a woman's childhood and they highlight the significance of the mother-daughter dyad. Tolman, Impett, Tracy & Michael (2006) claimed that mother's in subordinate roles might encourage their daughters to adhere to patriarchal notions of femininity. This highlights the need for counselling psychologists to be aware of a woman's social position, how she perceives her role in society and how this could be connected with her feelings of frustration, anger and her acts of violence. This research indicates that issues of gender and difference are important and that the assumption women perpetrate domestic violence for the same reasons as men could be deemed short sighted. Few of the women in this study perceived their violence as connected with a desire to control the other, and they perceived it as having an array of different and complex triggers. Taking into account that a number of the women perceived their violence as connected with an intense, rapidly shifting array of different emotions we might consider the need to work with women on their emotion regulation and their approach to managing negative emotions in partner relationships specifically (Linder & Collins, 2005).

It also seems clear that in order to work with violent women, female and male counselling psychologists should reflect on and consider their stance in relation to some of the myths that circulate about women and their capacity to be violent. This will require a capacity on the part of the counselling psychologist to challenge some of the stereotypical norms and ideas about femininity that exist. Importantly, such reflection will require an ability to reflect on one's own relationship with

anger and violence and to allow an exploration of the client's violence to enter the therapeutic space. This might seem threatening to any counselling psychologists, particularly, female ones, who rigidly adhere to the idea(s) that women are naturally passive and non-aggressive. This seems crucial bearing in mind that some of the participants expressed their desire to talk about their experiences and their accounts revealed a deep sense of aloneness. It is important that among Counselling Psychologists there is a willingness to think differently about domestic violence, in a way which goes beyond the idea that it stems from a violence that is asymmetrical or predominantly perpetrated by men toward female victims. In terms of the risk to and safety of our clients, it is crucial to consider the studies which show that female perpetrators of domestic violence are also at increased risk of severe retaliative assaults from men (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). It seems vital then that we are able to offer women who are violent some form of psycho education on the risks and consequences of perpetrating domestic violence in their relationships with men. Safety planning should be an important element of our work with women who are violent in our role as therapists.

This research has explored female perpetrators perceptions of their domestic violence toward men and as such it adds to an existing, yet limited number of studies which have investigated this phenomenon to date. Increasing studies of this nature is important given the multifaceted and complex nature of domestic violence and that the phenomenon is not well understood. Furthermore, there is still a tendency to ignore and a difficulty with acknowledging female perpetrated domestic violence in our society. Due to the highly distressing nature of perpetrating domestic violence and the potential impact on victims, further research

which examines the motivations, attitudes and experiences of women who perpetrate domestic violence and the impact on male victims seems warranted.

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Fig. 1.

Name *	Age	Marital Status	Recruited from...	Ethnicity	Number of dependants	Socioeconomic status
Emma	29	M	Guild support services	White British	0	Working class
Deborah	39	Co	Domestic Violence Support Service	White British	2	Working class
Louise	37	Co	Guild Support Services	White British	0	Working class
Melanie	38	M	Marriage Care	White British	1	Middle class
Carla	35	M	Relate	White British	1	Working class
Laura	41	M	Temper	Chinese/American	1	Working class
Susan	37	Co	Cranstoun	White British	0	Working class
Jennifer	42	M	Cranstoun	Asian British	2	Working class

* Pseudonyms replace real names in all instances



To Whom It May Concern:

I am interested in undertaking research into the experience of female perpetrators of domestic violence. I am looking to recruit 8 women for this study who would be willing to take part in a confidential interview exploring their experiences of perpetrating domestic violence. The interviews will be audio-recorded and analysed via IPA, a qualitative methodology.

The study has been approved by the University research board (8.4.2014) and subsequently received Ethical approval from the committee on (09.06.2014). I wonder if you would be able to help me with recruiting participants for this study? I am aware your organisation seeks to support and advise women in this situation, and it would be most helpful if, for example, there were an opportunity for me to meet some of the women you work with and introduce myself and the aims of the study.

The study aims primarily to explore women's experiences of perpetrating domestic violence in order to understand more about why this occurs. This is with a view to increasing the research that is available in this area and the likelihood that women will receive the help they need.

I would be most grateful if you could let me know whether this might be possible. I would be pleased to discuss this further with you - I can be contacted on ***** Alternatively, I would be happy to telephone you at a time suitable for you.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

Samantha Feirn (Trainee Counselling Psychologist)

Dr Rosemary Rizq – Tel 0208 392 576 Dr Diane Bray – Tel 0208 392 327

Email - R.Rizq@roehampton.ac.uk

Email – D.Bray@roehampton.ac.uk

(Principal Lecturer and Supervisor) (Head of academic department)



Participants Required

Are you struggling with anger, aggression or even violence in your partner relationships and wish to voice your experiences in a confidential discussion? If so, would you be willing to take part in a one hour (approx) interview in a private setting regarding your experiences of violence or aggression toward your partner?

I am interested in exploring women's experiences of behaving violently in their partner relationships. I consider this an important area of study if women are to receive the help that they need yet seldom receive. If you are interested in taking part in this study you can contact me on the email address or telephone number outlined below. The interviews would take place via skype and will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcribing.

Thank you

Samantha Feirn

(Trainee Counselling Psychology – University of Roehampton)

Contact email - feirns@roehampton.ac.uk

Contact Telephone - *****

Dr Rosemary Rizq – Tel 0208 392 576 Dr Diane Bray – Tel 0208 392 327

Email - R.Rizq@roehampton.ac.uk Email – D.Bray@roehampton.ac.uk

(Principal Lecturer and Supervisor) (Head of academic department)



Information sheet for participants.

Title of Research Project:

An exploration of women's perceptions of perpetrating domestic violence against their partners. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

I am a student and trainee with the University of Roehampton undertaking a Doctoral programme in Counselling Psychology. The study is being carried out as part of the programme.

The study aims to explore the experiences of women who find they behave violently in their relationships toward their partner. I am interested in interviewing women who think of themselves as the violent partner within a heterosexual partner relationship. Understanding the experiences of female perpetrators of domestic violence and the reasons why this behaviour arises is an important area of research. This is because the misrecognition or avoidance of this topic means women experiencing such difficulties seldom receive the help they might need.

Participants who agree to take part in this study will be asked about their experiences of why they are violent and how they understand this. The interview will be **audio – taped** so that I can write up and explore what is said to me during the interview at a later date. The tapes will be kept securely for up to ten years after which they will be destroyed. All identifying information will be removed from the transcripts to protect participant anonymity and maintain confidentiality. The interview should take approximately 1 - 2 hours and you will have an opportunity to read your transcript once it has been completed.

Participants agreeing to take part in this study will be treated confidentially and this means that everything that is said to me during the interview will be treated as private and will not be shared. It is anticipated that your accounts will be retrospective, however if you explicitly state that you intend to commit serious harm to your partner or to yourself then this information will be disclosed. The

instances under which this information might need to be shared are therefore if it is indicated by you that you intend to harm yourself or cause harm to another person. I will inform you as to whom that information might be relayed.

You will be supplied with the details of various organisations whom you can contact for help and advice should you need to speak to someone or if you are upset and distressed following anything that arises from the interview today. Those contacts are outlined in this form and on the participant de-brief that will be supplied to you at the end of the interview.

If you have any questions regarding the interview, the aims of that and it's overall purpose then please do not hesitate to ask me

Thank you

Samantha Feirn (Trainee Counselling Psychologist)

Useful contact numbers for support

Samaritans – 08457 90 90 90

Respect – 0207 549 0578

Mind – 0208 59 2122

NHS Direct - 0845 4647

Mankind – 01823 334244

Relate – 0300 100 1234

***** Domestic violence 24 hours helpline for men and women – 01483 776822

Contact

Department of Psychology

University of Roehampton,

Whitelands College

Holybourne Avenue

SW15 4JD

Telephone – 0208 392 3000

Researcher – Samantha Feirn

(feirns@roehampton.ac.uk)

Dr Rosemary Rizq – Tel 0208 392 576 Dr Diane Bray – Tel 0208 392 327

Email - R.Rizq@roehampton.ac.uk

Email – D.Bray@roehampton.ac.uk

(Principal Lecturer and Supervisor) (Head of academic department)



ETHICS COMMITTEE

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project:

An exploration of women's perceptions of perpetrating domestic violence against their partners. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Brief Description of Research Project:

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. I am hoping to explore why women who self identify as the primary aggressor perpetrate domestic violence toward their partner. This research aims to explore the reasons why women perpetrate domestic violence toward their partner and the self perceived causes of that. Understanding the experiences of female perpetrators of domestic violence is an important area of research as the misrecognition or avoidance of this topic means women experiencing such difficulties seldom receive the help they might need. I am hoping to recruit approximately 8 – 10 female participants and the interviews will take approximately 1 - 2 hours. Interviews will be held in a private interview room on the premises of the charity organisation from which participants were recruited or, where appropriate, via skype.

Investigator Contact Details:

Name – Samantha Feirn

Department – Psychology

University address –

University of Roehampton,

Whitlands College,

Holybourne Avenue,

Postcode – SW15 4JD

Email – feirns@roehampton.ac.uk

Telephone – 0208 392 3000

Consent Statement:

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator unless I say anything during interview that indicates I intend to cause harm to myself or to another person. I understand that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings.

Items 1 – 5	Please tick each one if you agree to consent to those
I have read and understood the information provided by the researcher about this study and I agree to participate	
I agree to my interview being audio recorded and transcribed	
I am aware that I am free to withdraw from the study at any point without giving reason	
I am aware should I withdraw after the data has been analysed and submitted for publication, my contribution will still be included but in anonymised, unidentifiable, collated form	
I understand the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings	
I understand disclosure about risk of harm to myself or others may result in the breaching of confidentiality by the researcher	

Name

Signature

Date

Please note: if you have a concerns about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator. However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies.)

Director of Studies Contact Details:

Head of Department Contact

Name - Dr Rosemary Rizq

Name – Dr Diane Bray

University Address –

University of Roehampton

University of Roehampton,

Whitelands College

Whitelands College,

Holybourne Avenue

Holybourne Avenue,

SW15 4JD

SW15 4JD

Email – R.Rizq@roehampton.ac.uk Email - D.Bray@roehampton.ac.uk

Telephone - 0208 392 576

Telephone - 0208 392 3627



Title of Research Project:

An exploration of women's perceptions of perpetrating domestic violence against their partners. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Demographic Questionnaire

Please can you answer the following questions;

Age

Ethnicity

Married and/or cohabiting (Please circle)

Length of time in your current relationship

Number of dependants.....

Are you currently receiving any form of psychological therapy? YES/NO (Please circle)

Thank you

Samantha Feirn

(Trainee Counselling Psychologist)



The interview schedule

Title of Research Project:

An exploration of women's perceptions of perpetrating domestic violence against their partners. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

The following questions will be used to guide the interview

- 1 Thank you for coming forward to take part in this study, can you tell me why you came forward?
- 2 Can you tell me about a recent incident that took place between you and your partner
- 3 Can you tell me how you explain to yourself what happened between you and your partner?
- 4 Is there anything more you can tell me that would help me understand your experiences of domestic violence?

Prompts;

How did that make you feel?

Can you tell me more about that?

What did that mean to you?

Thank you

Contact

Department of Psychology

University of Roehampton,

Whitelands College

Holybourne Avenue

SW15 4JD

Telephone – 0208 392 3000

Researcher – Samantha Feirn (feirns@roehampton.ac.uk)

Dr Rosemary Rizq – Tel 0208 392 576 Dr Diane Bray – 0208 392 3627

Email - R.Rizq@roehampton.ac.uk Email – D.Bray@roehampton.ac.uk

(Principal Lecturer and Supervisor) (Head of academic department)



Participant debrief

Title of Research Project:

An exploration of women's perceptions of perpetrating domestic violence against their partners. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Thank you very much for participating in the study. I understand that some of what you discussed today might be difficult and unsettling for you and I would therefore like to leave you with these contact numbers should you wish to speak to someone following this study. Please note, this form also includes a number for a support service that works with male victims of domestic violence.

Samaritans – 08457 90 90 90

Respect – 0207 549 0578

Mind – 0208 59 2122

NHS Direct - 0845 4647

Mankind – 01823 334244

Relate – 0300 100 1234

***** Domestic violence 24 hours helpline for men and women – 01483 776822

If you have any concerns about the study and wish to contact someone at the University of Roehampton then **please contact;**

Department of Psychology

University of Roehampton,

Whitelands College

Holybourne Avenue

SW15 4JD

Telephone – 0208 392 3000

Researcher – Samantha Feirn (feirns@roehampton.ac.uk)

Dr Rosemary Rizq – Tel 0208 392 576 Dr Diane Bray – 0208 392 3627

Email - R.Rizq@roehampton.ac.uk Email – D.Bray@roehampton.ac.uk

(Principal Lecturer and Supervisor) (Head of academic department)

Thank you

Samantha Feirn (Trainee Counselling Psychologist)

**Evidence of the ethical approval sent by email to Samantha Feirn by Jan
Harrison – received 09.06.2014**

Consider the environment. Please don't print this e-mail unless you really need to.

Dear Samantha,

Ethics Application

Applicant: Samantha Feirn
Title: An exploration of women's perceptions of perpetrating
domestic violence against their partners. An Interpretative Phenomenological
Analysis
Reference: PSYC 14/ 129
Department: Psychology

Many thanks for your response and the amended document. Under the procedures agreed by the University Ethics Committee I am pleased to advise you that your Department has confirmed that all conditions for approval of this project have now been met. We do not require anything further in relation to this application.

Please note that on a standalone page or appendix the following phrase should be included in your thesis:

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference PSYC 14/ 129 in the Department of Psychology and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 09.06.14.

Please advise us if there are any changes to the research during the life of the project. Minor changes can be advised using the Minor Amendments Form on the Ethics Website, but substantial changes may require a new application to be submitted.

Many thanks,

Jan

Jan Harrison

Ethics Officer, Research Office, Department of Academic Enhancement

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Reflective Journal extracts

14.08.14 – there seems to be a shifting of blame in the accounts, at one moment their violence is justified and blame seems to be explicitly directed out toward a partner or it is eternalised and apportioned to some other factor. This then changes through out some of the accounts, and blame appears to be self directed – there seems to be a lot of berating of the self - anger turned inwards or back on the self. Self loathing and frustration with the self is revealed in some of the accounts. This self loathing and interrogating of the self in the aftermath of an angry or aggressive outburst made me think about my own feelings in the aftermath of any conflict that I have experienced in interpersonal relationships.

19.09.2014 – Shame seems to be in most of the women's accounts and there is a real sense of their pain and a sense of sadness, disbelief and shock at what they have done. This seems connected in some way with the possibility of having caused harm to a partner but it appears to be linked with a grieving for the self – there is a sense that some part of the self has been lost through their violent actions toward the other. Shame seems to have some connection with the desire to cut off and reject the violent/aggressive self – perhaps giving this very part of the self more power and a greater ferocity.

8.1.2015 – I was suddenly aware of feeling rather shocked at some of the disclosures and what appeared to be a lack of remorse or regret in ***** account. There was also a greater feeling that ***** desired control over a partner, perhaps viewing her violence as a way to gain compliance from a partner. There was something about the lack of any trace of regret that seemed to unnerve me slightly – perhaps because this is at total odds with the notion of the nurturing, caring woman or my own ideas about femininity.

Master Theme 1 – Violence in the wake of multiple triggersSub Themes – The desire to be heard

“so my way of most probably getting him back becau- words don’t say anything to him words do not mean nothing so the only thing I could get him back”

- Reacting to a sense of injustice, betrayal and disrespect

“level of you know just the level of things you are doing it is just wrong”

- The desire for retribution

“what he has done is so wrong and he, and I need to teach him a lesson, I sound like a wife beater saying that”

- The fight for survival

“I am going to get hurt, I am going to get, something is going to happen to me, I thought at that point, I am going to get, completely and utterly destroyed in some way”

Master Theme 2 – The all encompassing emotional experienceSub Themes – Frustration and anger

“and the frustration of not being understood, not listened to and I don’t think hitting him is going to make him feel like that but I know it is going to make him hurt physically”

- Shame and worthlessness

“I feel ashamed that, you know, that one I inflicted harm on a person”

Master Theme 3 – Violence as the unrecognisable intruderSub Themes – Possessed by an alien other

“erm:::I, it was, was quite erm:::it was almost like something had kind of risen up on the inside and, it, it was almost like, it was, it was almost, kind of, you know, I, I don’t know whether to call it a righteous act”

- The struggle to fathom and bear the reality of one’s aggressiveness

“I say to myself why am I don’t understand why I do it”

